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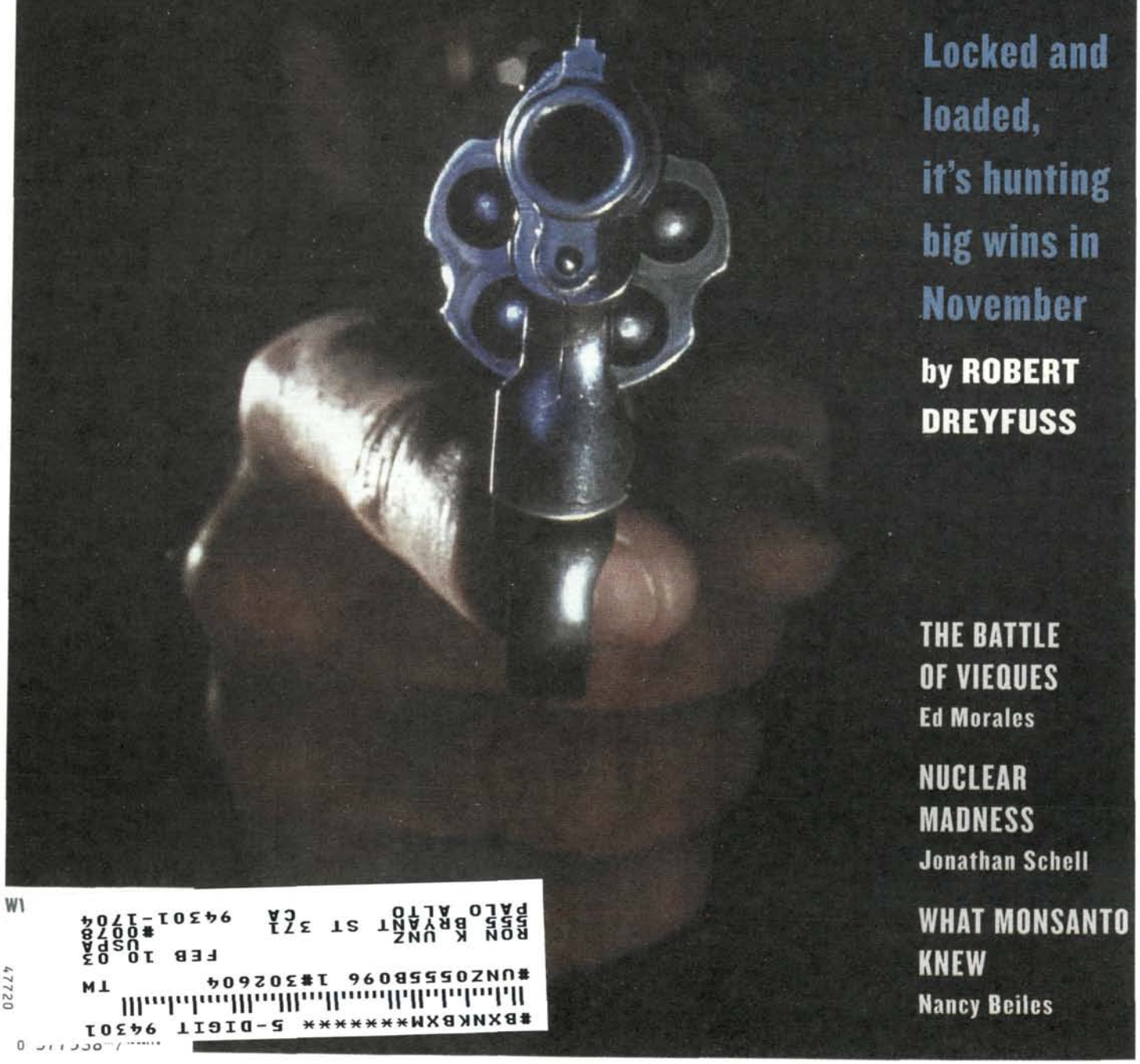

Locked and loaded, it's hunting big wins in November

by ROBERT DREYFUSS

THE BATTLE OF VIEQUES
Ed Morales

NUCLEAR MADNESS
Jonathan Schell

WHAT MONSANTO KNEW
Nancy Beiles

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LETTERS

Letters

At Indiewood & Vine

New York City

■ As one who has worked on both sides of the camera and court on indies in Manhattan, I found your April 3 Independent Film Issue fascinating and forwarded it to numerous people within the community.

MELANIE GOODMAN DANTÉ

Los Angeles

■ Everyone has some sort of Indiewood story right now, but [guest editor] Peter Biskind's selection of interviewees, the questions asked and the timeliness of *this* Indiewood story are most impressive. SHEIGH CRABTREE

New York City

■ Your "independent" film issue read like it was compiled on the back lot of a Burbank studio. It was bereft of any discussion of the thriving US documentary scene, of any current indie work that isn't feature-oriented and of the thousands of film and videomakers who are ignoring the existence of Hollywood with their experimental and/or activist-oriented work. Have you heard of media activism (*Showdown in Seattle: 5 Days That Shook the WTO*)? personal documentary (*POV*'s summer series is chock-full)? experimental narrative (Claire Denis and James Benning)?

There is a massive community of makers out there creating work deliberately outside the mainstream. And their work is thriving. Developments like the Internet, along with filmgoers' general feeling of disgust with the status quo, is helping this work get seen. As a result, we're in the midst of an incredible shift in the "marketplace" of ideas and images. But you spent dozens of pages of your "independent" issue focusing on Hollywood. What's so independent about that?

One of the things "independence" is supposed to do is bring a voice to the otherwise voiceless. The work is out there. So is the audience. All we have to do is help bring the two together. We suggest you commission a special issue focusing on *truly* independent work. Populist work. Underground work. Work with heart and soul. Imagine an entire issue about film, video and media in which the H-word goes unspoken. Now *that* would be independent.

JIM MCKAY, ROBB MOSS, DIANE MARKROW, ROBERT RICHTER, VALERIE SOE, LEE LEW LEE, GRAHAM LEGGAT, RICK LINKLATER, VIVIAN KLEIMAN, DEE DEE HALLECK, DOUG BLOCK
Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers

Los Angeles

■ Can *The Nation* get any whiter or lamer? Your special issue perpetuated a mostly white, albeit gender-balanced, view. In the roundtable discussion, where was someone like pioneering independent Charles Burnett, or Julie Dash? And no mention was made of the fact that David O. Russell tried, unsuccessfully, to keep John Ridley's name—a black screenwriter and novelist—off *Three Kings*.

Are *Nation* editors clueless, or did they chose to ignore what's been happening on the filmmaking scene for the past five or six years? When you have someone like rap mogul Percy Miller, *a k a* Master P, making *beaucoup* cheddah with his direct-to-video product, that's a phenomenon outside the studio system one has to pay attention to. Granted, the content should be criticized, but the fact that urban and suburban youth are flocking to video stores to rent and buy his films means there are strata out there your highfalutin filmmakers ain't resonating with.

The *Los Angeles Times Magazine* recently had Ice Cube on its cover along with others as new players laying down new rules in Hollywood. Ice Cube, who was in *Three Kings*, proved that the gangsta/urban aesthetic could be translated into box office and critical attention with *Friday* and *Next Friday*, indies he co-produced, wrote and directed. If the *LA Times* is hip enough to recognize the changing nature of the game, what's *The Nation*'s excuse? Where was Ang Lee, Russell Simmons, Zeinabu Irene Davis (whose *Testament* recently played Sundance), Moctesuma Esparza, Gregory Nava, Carlos Avila, Eriq LaSalle (yes, he of *ER* who's made some thought-provoking indies, such as *Bomb Squad*), Vondie Curtis Hall, Jesus Trevino, Malcolm Lee or any of a long list of filmmakers and new-technologies producers of color who should have been included in any serious examination of the so-called independent scene?

Or even an article that talked about the tension between independent filmmakers and the Hollywood craft unions. On one hand, as the issue acknowledged, runaway production has made a significant impact on the unions. On the other, filmmakers like Spike Lee have given jobs to those the unions have historically locked out. That's a weighty piece that could have been done.

And recently, Jamaa Fanaka, the filmmaker of the *Penitentiary* trilogy, had his $1.5 billion lawsuit (alleging gender and racial discrimination in employment) against the studios restored by the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. This is a significant occurrence that's been reported in the national press. Whatever its outcome, the fallout from the suit will reverberate for years throughout the industry and, more important, in the communities it seeks to empower. Again, where was *The Nation*?

GARY PHILLIPS

Los Angeles

■ Hearing the band of filmmakers attempt to define "independent cinema" was unsettling. To Kevin Smith it's a myth. To Christine Vachon it possibly never meant anything. Do any of these filmmakers realize that a viable independent film movement could exist if filmmakers like themselves were more interested in creating a community of like-minded people than in catering to their self-interests? Independent film is dying in America because most of the filmmakers see it as nothing more than a stepping-stone to Hollywood. Their first films are independent only by default, and once success comes, these filmmakers jump headlong into the very system that has co-opted and repackaged their movement and sold it back to them.

In the eighties, independent filmmakers like Jarmusch, Hartley, Jost, Sayles and others were independent because they had a vision and consciously chose to avoid entering a system that was more interested in the bottom line than artistic expression. As much as anything it was a political choice. How is it that these filmmakers nearly two decades later have managed to remain independent while all the new "indie" filmmakers join the ranks of studio bottom-liners? To Jarmusch, who has been courted by the system for years, the answer is the word itself: independence. For relative newcomers like Vachon and Smith to state that there is no such thing as independent cinema is an insult to the filmmakers who have never abandoned their original dedication to using film as something other than a marketing tool. What these filmmakers know that their younger peers do not is that a $15 million studio budget doesn't always mean a better film will be made. It's telling that Alexander Payne, the most political of the bunch, mentions Iran, a country that, despite limited resources and freedom of expression, has produced some of the best films of the past decade. It's also telling that Kimberly Peirce hits the nail right on the head when she says, "The real question is, What are the terms?" It's unfortunate that she was referring solely to her new studio deal. MIKE HARVKEY

San Francisco

■ I found Orville Schell's "Searching for the Dalai Lama" immensely enjoyable and infor-

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EDITORIALS

Guns, Mothers and Us

Has gun control's moment arrived? The Mother's Day march in Washington on May 14 certainly demonstrates that there is a constituency for an end to gun violence and to the legislative inaction caused by the power and money of the National Rifle Association. What is most striking about the Million Mom March—and why it just may represent a turning point in gun control efforts—is that its appeal is based on common sense. Unashamedly simple in its approach, the group's statement of purpose says that "the proliferation of firearms intended for one purpose only—killing another human being—has become untenable." In this regard, the most obvious analogy to the Million Mom effort is the Mothers Against Drunk Driving campaign of a few years ago—an imperfect but broadly effective effort. Through a vigorous campaign that raised public consciousness, MADD spurred changes ranging from the widespread acceptance of the idea of a "designated driver" to legislation holding bars responsible for the subsequent behavior of patrons.

The march also represents real political clout. These are women who vote and who represent, for both parties, a constituency without which they cannot win. Indeed, many politicians, including Bill and Hillary Clinton, have been falling all over themselves in an effort to become aligned with the nonpartisan march.

A demonstration, however, is not a movement. The question now is how the momentum of the march will translate into large efforts for cultural and legislative change. The march's specific demands—licensing of all gunowners and registration of all guns, among other measures—are useful. But some gun control proponents say that much of what's being called for is redundant and that even if implemented would amount to little more than symbolic victory. What's missing, they say, is a focus on the corporations that make and sell guns.

In fact, the gun control campaign as a whole is now at a crossroads between symbolic victory and substantive gain. The recent agreement HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo negotiated between Smith & Wesson and some of the thirty state and local governments suing gunmakers for negligence is a case in point. Touted by Handgun Control Inc. and the White House as a major step forward, the settlement amounted to little more than a hodgepodge of half-measures on safety features that gunmakers already adhere to. It would make almost no impact on the oversupply of guns in states with lax regulations—the key factor in urban crime and the basis for the only lawsuit against gun companies to succeed. The rest of the gun industry has put all settlement talks on hold, banking on the hope that George W. Bush—who shows no sign of abandoning his love affair with the gun interests—will be the next President.

Meanwhile, Kayne Robinson, the NRA's first vice president, who is also chairman of the Iowa Republican Party, privately told members in February that if Bush wins, "we'll have...a President where we work out of their office." And as Robert Dreyfuss reports on page 11 of this issue, the NRA is pouring money into GOP campaign coffers.

Mothers' movements have a long and honorable history, including such campaigns as women's suffrage and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Community and family safety are legitimate issues that could provide common ground between middle-class suburbanites and the inner-city poor, who still bear the brunt of gun companies' predatory distribution patterns. The Million Mom March is a good start, and a wake-up call to the political class. But it will take a serious effort at the state and local level and in Congressional districts—by mothers, and all Americans who care about gun control—to defeat the gun lobby and the NRA.

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The Battle of Vieques

Forty-six years after Lolita Lebrón and fellow Puerto Rican nationalists shot up the House of Representatives, wounding five members in a desperate act of defiance, Lebrón, along with Puerto Rican members of Congress Luis Gutiérrez and Nydia Velázquez, were arrested for an act of nonviolent resistance against the federal government. On May 4, 300 US Marshals and FBI agents cleared about 200 demonstrators from a Navy bombing range on the embattled island of Vieques. "Puerto Rico has been invaded again," said New York City Councilman José Rivera as he was led away. For Puerto Ricans on the island and the mainland, this was just another display of nineteenth-century gunboat diplomacy.

President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno were pleased that the removal played out nothing like the Elián-retrieval horror show, but the Vieques issue will not die out like a trash-can fire on a Little Havana boulevard. Puerto Ricans' opposition to the Navy's ecologically harmful, suffocating presence had been brewing long before the yearlong sit-in on Vieques, triggered by last April's bombing run that killed private security guard David Sanes. In 1989 I observed it firsthand during a reporting trip when I heard and felt the Navy's thundering assault on the beaches of Vieques.

The President's Vieques strategy appears to be dictated by a need to placate the military lobby. His plan, negotiated in conjunction with Puerto Rican Governor Pedro Rosselló, provides for an immediate $40 million boost to the Vieques economy and the resumption of limited Navy training using "dummy bombs"—which occurred a few days after the FBI action. A referendum, to be scheduled at the whim of the Navy, would allow the residents of Vieques to vote on whether the Navy should pull out entirely after three years; a vote to retain the Navy would garner the island another $50 million in aid. This combined stalling tactic and overt bribe might pave the way for the Navy to resume its flouting of agreements, as it did when it ignored a 1983 accord to improve the local economy.

Rosselló's complicity with this agreement has turned Puerto Ricans solidly against the pro-statehood politics of his New Progressive Party. The day after the removal of the protesters, Rosselló activated units of the National Guard, and an angry crowd of more than 1,000 demonstrators forced the cancellation of a ceremony at a renovated federal building in Old San Juan. The demonstrators smashed the windshield of pro-statehood former Governor Luis Ferré's car as he tried to drive through them. Rosselló's party is absorbing a blow it will probably not recover from in this year's gubernatorial elections, and the Independence Party, whose leader, Rubén Berríos, was virtually canonized as the patron saint of the Vieques squatters, will score some gains. But the big winner will probably be the status quo Commonwealth Party, which has always absorbed voters with nationalistic sentiments who are not ready for the left-leaning *independentistas*.

But while the Vieques fallout will likely only signal another change in power on the island in what is essentially a two-party

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system, its effect on mainland Puerto Ricans could be significant. When she was arrested, Representative Velázquez predicted that New York's Puerto Rican Day Parade on June 11 would become a massive rally supporting the Navy's removal from Vieques. The outrage demonstrated by Velázquez, Gutiérrez and Representative José Serrano, who was arrested at a Washington protest on May 4, may inspire a community of voters to become energized as never before. Senate candidate Hillary Clinton has called for an immediate and permanent end to the bombing. Presidential candidate Al Gore has issued only nebulous statements against the bombing while expressing support for the Clinton-Rosselló agreement, which is tied to the dubious referendum proposal.

Far from being resolved, the Vieques problem is just beginning to get serious. With the possibility of protesters still hidden deep inside the tangled brush of the Navy range and the vow of a coalition of clerical, union and Vieques activists to return to the protest site, Washington's only choice is increasing militarization of the island, which will bring more resentment. Vieques fishermen, the bulwark of the island's economy, have been denied access to lobster traps set offshore of Navy firing ranges.

President Clinton and Governor Rosselló, who claimed to support the people of Vieques, have betrayed Puerto Ricans by allowing bombing to resume. It is increasingly clear to Puerto Ricans on the island and on the mainland that the yearlong sit-in on Vieques *was* the referendum, and it is time for the United States to cease its duplicitous attempts at "fairness" and remove the Navy from Vieques once and for all. ED MORALES

Ed Morales, who writes about politics and culture for various publications, is writing a book, Speaking in Spanglish, *for St. Martin's Press.*

Nuclear Madness

One day early in the month I heard an astonishing announcement on the radio. I was on my way to get a cup of coffee before teaching a class in Middletown, Connecticut. I noticed that it was a few minutes to 9, and I decided to catch the top of the news. The station was the local NPR outlet, and the first thing I heard was the announcer saying, "At the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty conference in New York, the five major nuclear powers have announced their unequivocal commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons." No further detail was offered. Had the great turning point come? Had the United States and the other nuclear powers decided, after fifty-five years of living with the threat of nuclear annihilation, to disburden themselves and the world of this curse without limit?

Skepticism was in order. I went to the Internet, where, strangely, the news was not yet in evidence. Some phone calls revealed that the five would release a statement later in the afternoon. I permitted myself—perhaps a little willfully—a measure of hope. I pictured the five foreign ministers at a press conference announcing their historic change of heart and of policy. Even if the spectacular announcement was mainly rhetorical, I reflected, it would be a helpful benchmark in the coming fight for a world free of nuclear weapons. The news was worthy of the day around me: It was the peak of spring, the sun was shining, a cool breeze was blowing, the flowering trees were in full bloom. Was it possible that we were at last on our way to lifting the shadow that we had cast with our own human hands over all of this, over life on earth itself? And why not? Was it so implausible? Why, as the new century begins and ten years after the end of the cold war, should we endure any longer the presence among us of 32,000 nuclear weapons, in the hands of growing ranks of nuclear powers? As soon as one imagined that the decision had been made, it all seemed perfectly obvious—a matter of elementary common sense, the bare minimum of sanity and decency.

Well, it turned out, of course, that my imaginings had indeed been dreams. In actuality, the commitment was nothing more than routine lip service at the NPT conference by the five powers, in which they "reiterate" their "unequivocal commitment" to the "ultimate" goals of "a complete elimination of nuclear weapons and a treaty on general and complete disarmament...." The word "reiterate" (signaling "nothing new here"), the inclusion of the word "ultimate" (the internationally recognized code word for "never") and the coupling of nuclear abolition with the distant goal of "complete disarmament" gave the game away. There had been no change of heart, no change of policy. The nuclear powers were kicking dust in the world's eyes.

If anyone doubts this, they only have to read the language, made known to the world in the current issue of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, of the "talking points" given US officials for negotiations with Russia on the US proposal to field a National Missile Defense. The Russians should not worry that NMD will erode their capacity to destroy the United States, the negotiator is supposed to say, because "both the United States of America and the Russian Federation now possess, and, as before, will possess under the terms of any possible future arms reduction agreements, large, diversified, viable arsenals of strategic offensive weapons consisting of various types of ICBMS, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and heavy bombers."

In other words, as far as the United States is concerned, the "unequivocal commitment" to nuclear abolition apparently is to be achieved without the help of "any possible future arms agreements." (The document did not say how the unequivocal commitment *would* be honored.) The actual US policy, which is in fact to keep its nuclear arsenal indefinitely, was also revealed by the US response to a Russian proposal that in a potential START III agreement the sides reduce their arsenals to 1,500 strategic warheads each. No, the United States answered, we require—even in the context of mutual reductions—an arsenal of 2,500 nuclear warheads. Two thousand five hundred, evidently, is the point at which START stops. In case these statements were not clear enough, Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre gave the true US position once and for all in a little-noticed statement he made at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska: "Nuclear weapons are still the foundation of a superpower. That will never change."

It would be too simple, though, merely to accuse the United States of hypocrisy. The disorder is deeper. US nuclear policy since the end of the cold war has fallen into incoherence. At the

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root of the problem is the severance of nuclear strategy from connection with any current political reality. The cold war produced nuclear policies that were contradictory and self-destructive (envisioning, as they did, mutual assured destruction as the lodestar of strategy) but not incoherent. Whatever one thought about the policy of nuclear deterrence, it had the virtue of providing, for a time, an agreed-upon framework within which policy-makers on both sides of the conflict could assess the meaning of events—to judge what was "destabilizing" and what was stabilizing, what was provocative and what was reassuring. This consensus was lost with the end of the cold war, which, of course, was the political context that lent deterrence whatever sense it had.

Now, Administration policies are, on the one hand, still guided by deterrence, exactly as if the cold war were continuing. That is why Administration planners say that the reliance of the United States on nuclear weapons "will never change" and refuse even to consider reducing nuclear arsenals below some thousands of weapons. Yet, on the other hand, the Administration does know that the cold war *is* over, and that is why, with increasing frequency, it at the same time tries to persuade the world of its "unequivocal" commitment to nuclear abolition. It knows, too, that its own half-concealed determination to preserve nuclear arsenals indefinitely is a fatal flaw in US efforts to stop nuclear proliferation, including the incipient arms race in South Asia, and that is another reason that, in public negotiations like the NPT review conference, Washington falsely asserts its readiness to live in a world without nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, a new, third nuclear strategy, incompatible with both of the Administration's contradictory commitments, has arisen. This is the resolve of the majority of Republicans in the Senate to protect the United States from nuclear war by developing antinuclear defenses. The defenses they envision go far beyond the limited protection against "rogue" states that the Clinton Administration is trying to convince the Russians to accept by reminding them of Russia's overwhelming deterrent power. In the Republican vision, which harks back to President Reagan's hope for a space-based shield that would protect the United States against the Soviet arsenal, the goal of US policy, in the words of a recent report by the United States Space Command called *Vision for 2020*, should be "dominating the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investment" [see Karl Grossman and Judith Long, "Waging War in Space," December 27, 1999]. In such a world, plainly, nuclear deterrence would be a dead letter.

As if all this weren't chaotic enough, the Russians are pursuing a none-too-clear fourth vision. Fearful, after NATO expansion and the Kosovo war, of encroachment by the self-styled "only superpower," they have given nuclear weapons a new salience in their policy.

These four contradictory frameworks—the Administration's policy of cold war deterrence (sans cold war), into which it somehow hopes to incorporate an NMD; the world's expectation and demand for the abolition of nuclear weapons, to which the Administration pays lip service; the Republican vision of a solution to nuclear danger through antinuclear defenses, which would upend deterrence entirely; and a weakened Russia's resolve to preserve the nuclear parity won by the Soviet Union—are now on the verge of an incredibly complex multiple collision that has the potential to leave the arms-control agreements of the past forty years a shambles.

One more passage from the leaked American talking points for discussions with Russia on an NMD can serve as an illustration of the sort of unreal and senseless deliberation that is accompanying the slide toward disaster. The US negotiators, having depicted in glowing terms the capacity of Russia to annihilate the United States (but *why*?), are encouraged to go on to point out to the Russians the great value of a launch-on-warning posture for their forces. "Furthermore," the paper helpfully notes, "it is highly unlikely that any enemy [i.e., the United States] would ever contemplate a first strike, since it would have to assume that Russian ICBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles/nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines in port would be launched after tactical warning, which would neutralize the effectiveness of the assault."

A policy of tactical warning, commonly known as launch-on-warning, is the policy of responding to nuclear attack in the interval between the detection of an attack and the arrival of the bombs. Reliance upon it, by reducing decision time for Russian retaliation to less than five minutes, greatly increases the dangers of accidental attack on the United States. The deterioration of Russian command and control, including loss of some of its early-warning satellites, increases the danger of a mistaken launch. In order to fully grasp the irresponsibility of this advice to Russia, we must recall that NMD is as yet technically unproven. Yet in order to obtain this phantom protection, the Administration is willing to recommend to Russia reliance on a hairtrigger posture for missiles that

CALVIN TRILLIN

Second Thoughts on the Family Values Front

Republicans, observing young González
Removed at night, thought they could take some solace
From hearings showing Reno as a baddie.
But now it seems the hearings are on hold,
'Cause, finally, the leadership's been told
That people want this boy back with his daddy.

The leader, who is Lott of Mississippi,
Encouraged by the anti-Commie lip he
Could hear from demonstrations on the lawn,
Forgot that folks from Santa Fe to Yonkers
Consider that crowd absolutely bonkers.
At times Trent has some trouble catching on.

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decidedly do exist and have the potential today to erase the United States from the face of the earth.

The mischief does not stop there. The peculiar revelation that the United States is counting on the might of Russia's nuclear forces to nullify the threat of American NMD reveals to the nations now assembled at the NPT conference in New York that the United States' professed interest in full nuclear disarmament is hollow and therefore notably increases the pressures that since the proliferation in South Asia have been threatening to tear the whole fabric of the NPT apart.

During the cold war, the reasons for enduring nuclear peril were at least widely understood. What most characterizes the new nuclear dangers, by contrast, is a sort of cosmic pointlessness. The Clinton Administration's unbudgeable devotion to nuclear deterrence with arsenals of thousands of weapons condemns the United States to apocalyptic peril without any political justification. A policy of mutual assured destruction with our avowed friend postcommunist Russia may or may not be as dangerous as mutual assured destruction with the Soviet Union, but it certainly is crazier. The missile defenses insisted upon by the Republican Senate are a $60 billion solution that doesn't work to a problem that doesn't exist. The new Russian emphasis on nuclear forces represents the attempted substitution of the baseless and useless image of a superpower for the lost reality of being one. The diplomatic clash of these fantasies is, however, producing dangers that are immense and real—dangers of accidental nuclear war, of uncontrolled nuclear proliferation, of multiple new arms races.

The only vision that offers serious hope of heading off these gratuitous disasters is the simple, clear, sensible goal now being advocated in New York by most of the 182 countries that, under the terms of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, have renounced nuclear weapons. That is also a goal to which the nuclear powers gave mere lip service in the rhetorical commitment that briefly brightened my day in Connecticut. Until that commitment is real—but not until then—nuclear danger is destined to increase.

JONATHAN SCHELL

Jonathan Schell is The Nation*'s peace and disarmament correspondent and the Harold Willens Peace Fellow at the Nation Institute.*

In Fact...

TRIDENT'S A NONSTARTER

Jeff Shaw, a reporter who's covered the submarine base at Bangor, Washington, for the past two years, writes: Russia might be ready to START, but the United States is refusing even to begin. Despite Russia's mid-April ratification of the START II arms reduction treaty, the US Navy is going through with a multibillion-dollar weapons system upgrade on four Trident submarines, beginning with the USS Alaska, which arrived at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard on April 28. The Alaska and three other Tridents, now armed with Trident I (C4) missiles, will be outfitted with the newer, more powerful Trident II (D5) missiles. Purchase of the new missiles, base construction and modifications on the four subs will cost $9 billion. Here's the rub: The United States already has more D5 missiles and submarines to carry them than START II allows. Ten subs based at King's Bay, Georgia, carry a total of 1,920 warheads. START II mandates that Russia and the United States each reduce their submarine-launched warhead levels to 1,750, so if the United States is to comply with START II, 170 currently existing D5 warheads will have to disappear by December 31, 2007. If the upgrade of the four subs continues as planned, that number will escalate by an additional 768 warheads. When the Bush Administration ratified START II in 1993, the plan was to reduce the Trident fleet from eighteen submarines to ten, compared with the fourteen the Navy now wants. Reviving the Bush plan could save billions—and the arms control regime as well.

THE UNDERCOVERED COVERED

•Belated congratulations to Ken Silverstein, whose "Millions for Viagra, Pennies for Diseases of the Poor" (July 19, 1999) was ranked No. 2 on Project Censored's list of the twenty-five most undercovered stories of 1999. Silverstein's piece documents how the major pharmaceutical companies refuse to research medicines to cure life-threatening diseases in the Third World because such drugs would be unprofitable. Two other *Nation* articles received honorable mention: E.J. Graff's "Same-Sex Spouses in Canada" (July 12, 1999) and Dr. Neil Shulman's "Prescription: Protest" (August 9/16, 1999). This is Project Censored's twenty-fourth year of recognizing stories in magazines and newspapers that shine light on topics about which the mainstream media keep us in the dark. The awards are coordinated by the sociology department at Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, California (www.projectcensored.org).

•And while we're collecting awards, let us note that Terry Tempest Williams's "A Shark in the Mind of One Contemplating Wilderness" (November 29, 1999) was selected for inclusion in this year's *Best American Essays*, a book edited by Alan Lightman, to be published by Houghton Mifflin in October.

MAYOR LIVINGSTONE, WE PRESUME

Our man "Red Ken" Livingstone did it! He was elected Mayor of London, defying everything Tony Blair and the Labour Party could throw at him (see D.D. Guttenplan, February 28). We plan a report on Livingstone's victory in an upcoming issue.

TWO-CHINA POLICY

Last spring China's Ambassador to the United States, Li Zhao Xing, was minding his own business in an NBC studio as he waited to appear on *Meet the Press*. Suddenly, he was accosted by a plumpish white American male, who began ranting: "Don't take the weakness of this American President as the weakness of the American people." When the ambassador looked at him blankly the man grabbed him, pulled him close and repeated his words slowly for emphasis. Later, the ambassador learned that his accoster was Tom DeLay, House majority whip. DeLay, who recently revealed the encounter to reporters from the *Washington Post*, explained his actions: "It shows you that if you stand up to a bully, then you control the bully. If you kowtow to the bully, the bully will run your life forever. And that's the way I see these people." Now DeLay is chief House bully in the project of rounding up votes for the President's bill giving China permanent normal trade relations.

NEWS OF THE WEAK IN REVIEW

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer, has called for the elimination of a $750,000 program that would provide free prostate cancer screening for uninsured New Yorkers.

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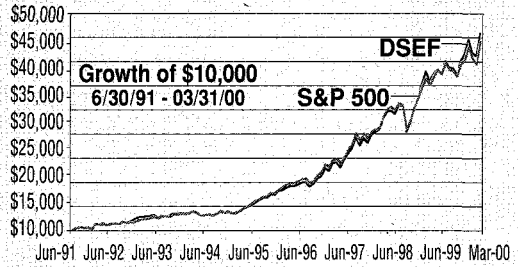
DOMINI SOCIAL EQUITY FUND vs. S&P 500[1]



Avg. Annual Total Returns as of 3/31/00[1]	DSEF	S&P 500 Index
1 year	20.30%	17.94%
3 year	30.21%	27.39%
5 year	27.91%	26.75%
Since Inception (6/31/91)	19.55%	19.13%

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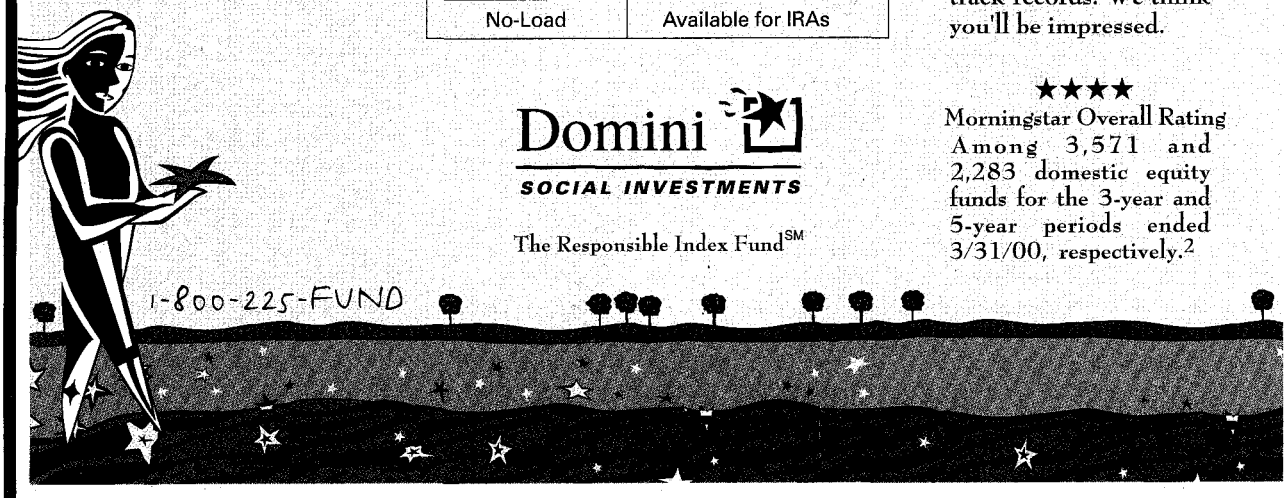

For more information including fees and expenses, call for a free prospectus. Please read it carefully before you invest. **1.** Total return figures are historical and include changes in share price, reinvestment of dividends and capital gains. The Fund waived certain fees during the period, without which returns would have been lower. The Standard & Poor's 500 Index is an unmanaged index in which direct investment cannot be made. **2.** Morningstar proprietary ratings are subject to change monthly and reflect historical risk-adjusted performance as of 3/31/00. They are calculated from the fund's 3- and 5-year average annual returns in excess of 90-day T-bill returns with appropriate fee adjustments, and a risk factor that reflects fund performance below 90-day T-bill returns. The Fund received four stars for the 3-year period and four stars for the 5-year period. The top ten percent of funds in their broad asset class receive five stars, the next 22.5% receive four stars and the next 35% receive three stars.

Although the Fund is no-load, certain fees and expenses apply to a continued investment. DSIL Investment Services, LLC, Distributor. 4/00

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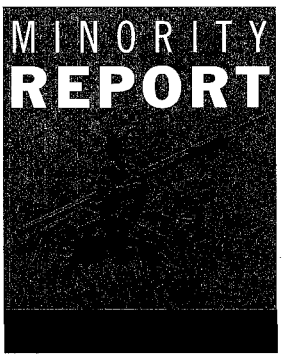
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Who's Sorry Now?



The apology and restitution business, which has been evolving into an ever-smoother operation over the past few years, has just come up with something genuine. President Mathieu Kerekou, of the tiny West African state of Benin, has sent a delegation to the United States to apologize for his country's role in the slave trade. "We cry for forgiveness and reconciliation," said Luc Gnacadja, Benin's Minister of Environment and Housing, while visiting the former Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. This ought to put a few people to shame; an apology that actually accepts responsibility, and that costs something in terms of pride.

In demanding reparations for slavery and racism in *The Nation* ("America's Debt to Blacks," March 13) and in his book *The Debt*, Randall Robinson naturally focused on America's own collective responsibility (different from collective guilt, as Willy Brandt demonstrated by kneeling at the gates of the Warsaw Ghetto) for the trade. The book also cites my friend Basil Davidson, one of the pre-eminent historians of Africa, whom I once heard discuss this issue at Robinson's TransAfrica offices. "There is the moral question," he said, "of whether the sellers as well as the buyers should pay. In several cases the names of the profiteering West African dynasties are known, and their fortunes are still extant." This point is typically overlooked, both by white racists who can't conceive of Africa as possessing its own history and institutions, and by some black nationalists who concentrate only on the American side of the Middle Passage. But under its ancient name of Dahomey, Benin was the place where perhaps 3 million Africans were kidnapped, not by white slavers but by those who sold them the cargo.

There isn't a precise moral equivalent here; it wasn't the locals who instigated the trade, or who supervised the appalling cruelty of the Middle Passage, or who later worked the victims to death. Nor was it really the locals who profited by the business, except in the short term; indeed, by acting in this way they became complicit in the plundering and "underdeveloping" of their own continent. Still, Gnacadja isn't overstating matters, or being masochistic, when he says that "the slave trade is a shame, and we do repent for it."

On his perfunctory tour of Africa in 1998, Clinton did utter a few words of apology for slavery, as well as (while he was at it) for failure to react fast enough to genocide in Rwanda. But these were easy, prayer-breakfast type generalizations. He didn't apologize in real terms, for refusing to let his Administration use the word "genocide" at the time—which would have acted as a legally mandatory trigger for intervention—or for supporting the French military intervention on the side of the Rwandan murderers. Nor was this, as some claimed, the first such apology for slavery by an incumbent President. In his second inaugural address, Lincoln managed some rather finely wrought words on the subject, and on the awful nemesis it had brought—with every drop of blood drawn by the lash being repaid with the sword. You can read them on the wall of his memorial.

Emerging from that memorial, however, onto the very Mall where once there stood a busy slave market, you won't find anything that specifically commemorates the bitter origins of African America. Last fall I went to the groundbreaking of the future Museum of the American Indian. The site is the last available space on what some people call Smithsonian Row. There's no room for any more museums in the capital's primary setting. Nobody can object to its being dedicated in this fashion—"the last site goes to the first inhabitants," as one participant put it—but there's politics to this, as there is to everything else. My friend Suzan Harjo of the Morning Star Institute, a Cheyenne lady who was much involved in the campaign for the museum, told me that some of the authorities at the Museum of Natural History originally wanted the site for a "Museum of Man." When they were outvoted by those who wanted a Native American museum, they passed the word to some black spokesmen in DC that the Indians had taken their potential site. (This was also at about the time that the Holocaust Memorial Museum was being mooted.) "I had to spend a lot of time in black churches, telling them that we hadn't tried to one-up them," recalls Harjo. "The worst was the rumor that we had proposed splitting the site and allowing them half as a consolation prize." Divide and rule—it works like a charm as long as the etiquette of apology is only skin-deep.

If you don't want to sound like the Pope, who apologizes for everything and for nothing, then your apology should cost you something. If Clinton proposed renaming the J. Edgar Hoover building, for instance, as some restitution for state-supported police racism, that would be serious. Dream on. One reason for the recent series of reciprocal breakthroughs in Northern Ireland is that Tony Blair did not just make a fuzzy statement of regret for the Irish potato famine (though he did do that). He decided to order a reopening of the inquiry into the "Bloody Sunday" massacre of 1972, an atrocity whose survivors are still living. People forget that the last time the IRA "decommissioned" its stock of weapons, which was in the sixties, its reward was to see Catholic neighborhoods like Bombay Street in Belfast burned out in loyalist and police pogroms, and British paratroopers shooting down unarmed civilians. Not only that, but a solemn judicial commission of inquiry, chaired by a respected judge, "found" that the Bloody Sunday victims had asked for it (the events are set down in a new book, *Those Are Real Bullets Aren't They?* by Peter Pringle and Philip Jacobson, forthcoming from Grove/Atlantic). Many of today's Sinn Feiners are people who ran off and joined the IRA that very week. (They also have a certain amount of apologizing to do.) In general, it is the stronger or the victorious side that should inaugurate the magnanimous gestures. However, there is power in smaller offerings too, which is why the initiative taken by President Kerekou ought to reopen the whole debate on "The Debt" and how to do something noble to try to redeem it. ■

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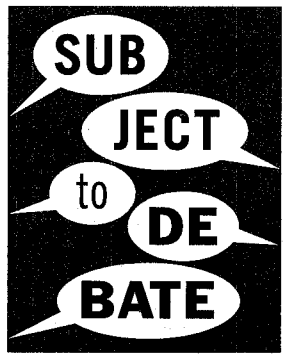
KATHA POLLITT

Underground Against the Taliban



The atrocities of the Afghan Taliban toward women have been widely reported in the Western press: women banned from work; forbidden to leave their homes unless shrouded in the burkha, a voluminous top-to-toe covering with a mesh grid over the eyes, and accompanied by a male relative (this in a country filled with widows, 30,000 in Kabul alone, after twenty years of constant warfare); girls' schools shut down; medical care denied, even in life-threatening emergencies. Human rights organizations have made important gestures: In 1998 Physicians for Human Rights did a well-publicized study of Afghan women's health, showing grave depression and suicidal tendencies; Amnesty International has declared the entire female population of Afghanistan prisoners of conscience. But mostly we still construe Afghan women as victims, passive and silent under their burkhas. We don't hear much about them organizing politically and taking action on their own behalf.

That's why it is so refreshing and stirring to meet the two young Afghan women who call themselves Sajida and Sehar, who are currently traveling around America representing the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. RAWA, which was founded as a women's rights group in 1977 and is now based in the refugee areas of Northwest Pakistan, has had the audacity to oppose not just the Soviet occupiers and the Taliban but all the foreign-backed fundamentalist warlords that have made Afghan life a misery; it supports human rights for women—and for men, too—and dares to imagine (although the particulars get a little vague here) that Afghanistan might someday be a secular democracy. Meanwhile, RAWA runs secret schools for girls inside Afghanistan and open schools for both sexes in the refugee camps. It has also started mobile healthcare teams and income-generating projects, such as carpet-weaving, that women can do while confined to their homes. In fact, Sehar and Sajida arrived in the States lugging six darkly beautiful but rather cumbersome carpets to sell in order to raise funds, which gives you an idea of the modesty of RAWA's budget.

And then there is the video. Contrast the Orientalized image of the passive, mysterious Muslim woman enticingly hidden behind her veil with this reality: Last November, when the Taliban summoned the women of Kabul to witness that city's first public execution of a woman, a RAWA member brought a camcorder under her burkha—which would seem to have its uses—and taped the grisly proceedings. If she had been caught, she would have been severely beaten, perhaps even killed. Similar risks attend RAWA members who teach girls in secret classes, who provide medical care undercover in remote districts or who demonstrate against the Taliban in Pakistan, where their spirited rallies are regularly assaulted by Taliban and Pakistani police. What do you do when they come at you with sticks, I asked the slight and very serious Sehar, who seems about as aggressive as a fawn. "We hit them right back," she replied with a little smile. "We have sticks too."

Together with Feminist Majority Foundation and the National Committee of Women for a Democratic Iran, RAWA held a small but vigorous rally in Lafayette Park in front of the White House on April 28, anniversary of the triumph of the warlords in 1992. Under an overcast spring sky, two women in turquoise burkhas held a long banner adorned with gruesome photographs—women begging in a marketplace; a child with amputated legs tied off like balloons; a grinning boy with a string of severed hands slung over his shoulder. Eleanor Smeal spoke eloquently, without notes; there were messages of support from Representative Carolyn Maloney and Senator Harry Reid; Sajida, refusing the sunglasses that were supposed to protect her from being identified by the Taliban, called on the UN to enforce peace and democracy—a utopian demand if ever there was one. Troops of white, middle-American tourists—families, high school kids on their class trip—stared at the burkhas and the banner and the angry orating women for a moment and moved on.

Tacitus famously wrote that the Roman army made a wasteland and called it peace. America, it might be said, creates its wastelands by proxy, romanticizing as noble freedom fighters thugs and fanatics who throw acid on unveiled women's faces and have no interest in anything but their own power—and then looks at the result with puzzlement, as if Afghanistan were as distant and strange as the surface of the moon. There are those who argue that the Taliban simply represent Afghan culture, which has always been deeply Muslim: The burkha is nothing new; only a small percentage of girls, mostly those in cities, ever went to school. True enough, but if the Taliban were in accord with the local views, why the Kalashnikovs? Why the beatings in the streets? Before the Taliban took power, women in Kabul were 40 percent of doctors, 70 percent of teachers and 50 percent of the civil service; there were many thousands of female university students. In fact, the Taliban represent a modern and extreme version of Islam that was historically unknown in Afghanistan. And the Taliban, who are mostly Pashtun, impose Pashtun ways on other ethnicities in what was once a more mutually forbearing ethnic patchwork. Like the warlords, the Taliban are supported from abroad, until 1996 by the United States—yes, the same Clinton Administration that now courts feminist votes made no protest when the Taliban threw thousands of girls out of school after taking control of the city of Herat in 1995—and now they are financed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. (Ahmed Rashid's *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, just out from Yale University Press, gives an excellent political and historical account of the movement's rise to power.)

You can find out more about RAWA at www.rawa.org. In devastated Afghanistan, small donations go a long way: For $25 a month you can subsidize a teacher in an underground school; for $30 a month you can support a woman in a yearlong underground literacy and health-education course. Send cash or check, payable to "Support Afghan Women," to Support Afghan Women, PMB 226, 915 W. Arrow Highway, San Dimas, CA 91773. ■

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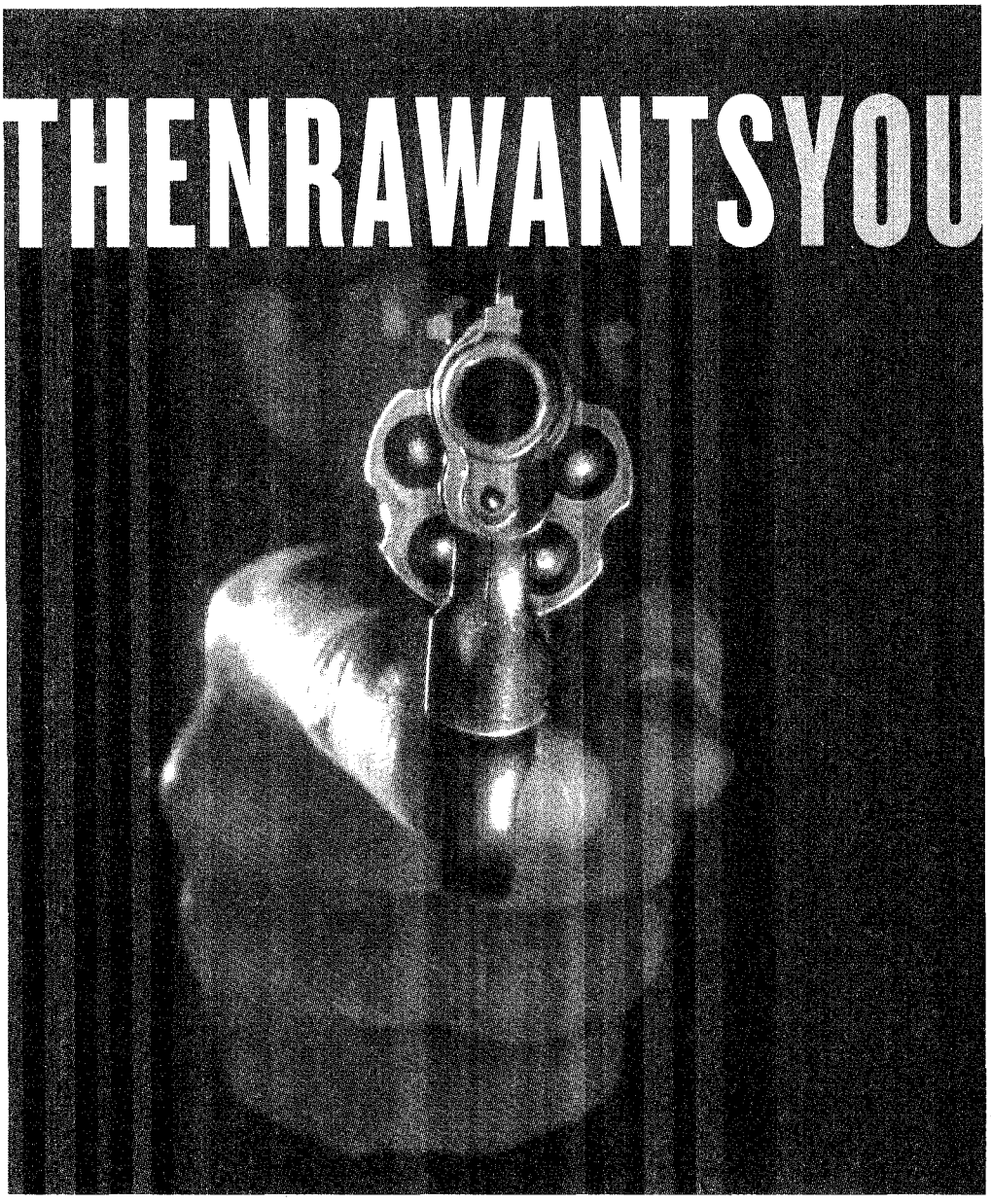

by ROBERT DREYFUSS

Locked and loaded, the National Rifle Association is mapping out its battle plan for Election 2000, flush with cash and boasting a membership that could reach an all-time high of 4 million by November. Half a decade ago, after losing bruising battles over the 1993 Brady Bill and the 1994 assault-weapons ban, the gun lobby was in trouble. Facing a financial crisis after running huge deficits several years in a row, it began losing large numbers of members and found itself involved in a bitter and divisive internal struggle that pushed it to the brink of collapse.

But it's back. Having purged itself of elements considered too hard-line even for its militant core, the NRA has reinvented itself as a slicker and more sophisticated organization, fronted by Hollywood's Charlton Heston and fielding a team of polished lobbyists on Capitol Hill. Its $135 million budget this year is close to 1994's record, and its political arm, the Institute for Legislative Action, has raised $25 million for 2000. The NRA's political action committee, the Political Victory Fund, had brought in $5.5 million by the end of February, well on its way toward its biggest total ever. And, in case anyone doubted the NRA's continuing clout on Capitol Hill, its lobbyists pulled off a masterful coup last year — killing a gun-control package in Congress at the very height of the clamor for action in the wake of the tragedy at Columbine High School.

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The Wall Street Journal
Stan Grossfeld
The Boston Globe
Christiane Amanpour
CNN/CBS News
Juan Gonzales
The New York Daily News
Laura Washington
The Chicago Reporter
Jason DeParle
The New York Times
Don Barlett & James Steele
Time

Harry Chapin Self-Reliance Awards
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LIFETIME: Low Income Families' Empowerment Through Education, Oakland, CA
Missouri Rural Crisis Center, Columbia, MO
Operation Spring Plant, Inc., Oxford, NC
The HOPE Program, Brooklyn, NY
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(800) 5-HUNGRY www.worldhungeryear.org
whyawards@aol.com

The NRA would love to engineer a repeat of 1994, the last time it went into an election year this strong. That year, though it would shortly start its spiral downward from a peak strength of 3.5 million members, the NRA played a critical role in helping the GOP sweep to power in Congress, with pro-gun voters making the difference in perhaps two dozen House races. Long allied with the Republican Party, the NRA has bound itself even more closely to the GOP in 2000, lavishing $550,000 in soft money on party committees. Above all, the NRA intends to help elect George W. Bush, the gun-friendly Texas Governor, as President. Kayne Robinson, the NRA's first vice president, who is also chairman of the Iowa Republican Party, privately told members in February that if Bush wins "we'll have...a President where we work out of their office." The organization will also go all out to help the Republicans maintain control of the House, whose most powerful member, Tom DeLay, the majority whip from Texas, is a close ally and two of whose members—Republicans Bob Barr of Georgia and Don Young of Alaska—sit on the NRA's board. In these battles, an important factor will be the NRA's cash—both in the form of campaign contributions and independent expenditures (which are regulated by the Federal Election Commission) and issue-advocacy ads (which are not). But even more crucial will be the NRA's ability to mobilize its grassroots base, especially in the band of states that includes Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Missouri, all swing states, whose votes are likely to decide the presidential contest.

But this isn't 1994. It's precisely in those states where the NRA may find itself fighting an uphill battle, and that's what makes this year the most severe test of its political muscle in memory. Raising the stakes even further, Handgun Control, Inc., the nation's largest gun-control group, plans to spend $2 million in PAC money in 2000, concentrating on a select list of House and Senate races.

Traditionally a political powerhouse in the Midwest, the NRA has suffered a series of stunning setbacks there since the massacre in Littleton, Colorado, a year ago. In Michigan, Illinois and Ohio, Republican governors have crossed the NRA on key gun issues, and in Missouri the NRA lost a hard-fought referendum over citizens' right to carry concealed weapons. Not only statewide but also in swing Congressional districts the NRA is running up against an unprecedented passion among anti-gun voters. According to pollsters and gun-control activists, a new phenomenon is occurring: For the first time, a constituency of anti-gun voters—led by city-dwelling and suburban women, Democrats and Republicans alike—is emerging to match the fervid intensity previously manifested only by the NRA's militant, pro–Second Amendment voter base. The mobilization of anti-gun sentiment, galvanized since Columbine, helped spark the so-called Million Mom March in Washington and dozens of other cities on May 14—Mother's Day—led by the soccer moms of political lore. "Columbine was a scary event for people," says Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster. The Midwest, she says, is "one of the places where you've seen the biggest shift, and it's also one region where the suburbs have grown the fastest."

Robert Dreyfuss is an independent journalist in Alexandria, Virginia. Research assistance was provided by the Elections 2000 Fund of the Nation Institute.

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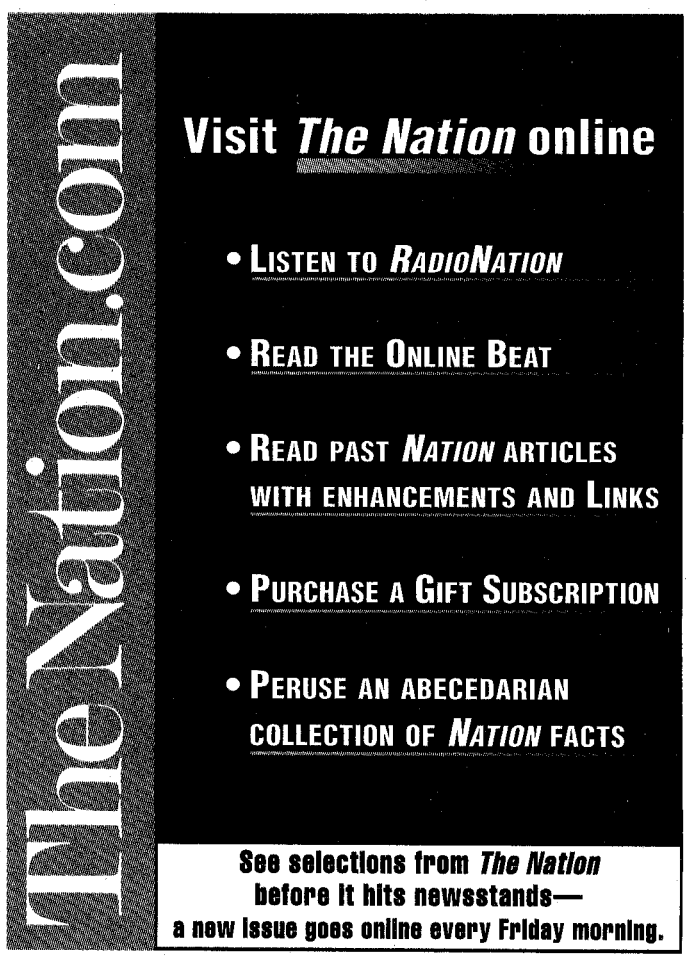
The ersatz prophet who's led the NRA out of its mid-nineties wilderness and into the new millennium is Charlton Heston, 75, who was elected to the NRA board in 1997 and rose quickly to its top post. (Reads an NRA bumper sticker: MY PRESIDENT IS CHARLTON HESTON.) At a packed forum at Georgetown University in March, hundreds of students leapt to their feet, shouting, whistling and stamping as Heston strode to the podium. As he started to speak in his trademark basso profundo voice, he was interrupted again by loud and sustained applause (interspersed with a few boos and catcalls). "A couple of years ago, I accepted the office of president of the National Rifle Association," he intoned. "And that's when the bombshells of the cultural war blew up all around me." Blasting political correctness and its alleged proponents (politicians, the media, Hollywood, academe), Heston proclaimed: "Right here and now, we are again engaged in a great war. And this campus is one of the battlegrounds."

While Heston does not always seem in full command in public situations—he tripped over his lines several times during the Georgetown speech, even referring to "George M. Bush," and announced during a recent ABC-TV appearance that the NRA had 33 million members instead of 3.3 million, despite his use of cue cards—he has played a key role in rebuilding the organization. As its public face, he has lent it credibility and star appeal, and in one important instance he threw his weight behind one faction in a key struggle for power.

Since the late seventies, the NRA has rooted itself firmly on the far right of the political spectrum. From 1991 until 1997, however, the organization was led further and further toward the radical-right political fringe by Neal Knox, an influential member of the board who stamped out the last vestiges of the more apolitical hunters and target shooters who'd been the NRA's backbone for decades while appealing to hard-core gun-culture aficionados. Knox also engineered the firing of the deft James Jay Baker, its chief lobbyist, who was replaced by Tanya Metaksa, a steely woman wont to spell her name thus: "M-E-T-A-K (as in AK-47) S-A (as in semiautomatic)." Spending tens of millions of dollars on costly direct-mail recruitment drives, the NRA built its membership to 3.5 million, but its strident militancy alienated Republican allies. Then, in April 1995, when it was revealed that Oklahoma City bomber Tim McVeigh was a card-carrying NRA member and that the NRA was sidling closer to the militia movement, the organization's stock plummeted. Former President George Bush resigned his lifetime NRA membership in disgust over the NRA's comparing of federal law enforcement officers to "jackbooted thugs," and in 1996 Senate majority leader Bob Dole took pains to distance himself from the NRA in his losing bid for the presidency. The NRA, edging closer to the fringe, declined to endorse Dole—though former lobbyist Baker, in exile, astutely formed Sportsmen for Dole to reaffirm the GOP's ties to gun owners. In the 1996 elections the NRA's support for ultraright Republicans ended in a brutal string of electoral defeats.

Eventually Knox overplayed his hand, seeking to replace the NRA's longtime spokesman and CEO, Wayne LaPierre. Pudgy and bookish, LaPierre wasn't trusted as a true believer by many of Knox's hard-line allies, and Knox also coveted the then-$190,000 salary that went with the job. In early 1997, at a raucous weekend meeting of the NRA's board that lasted till 5 AM Monday morning, Knox's insurrection was defeated by LaPierre. "I don't



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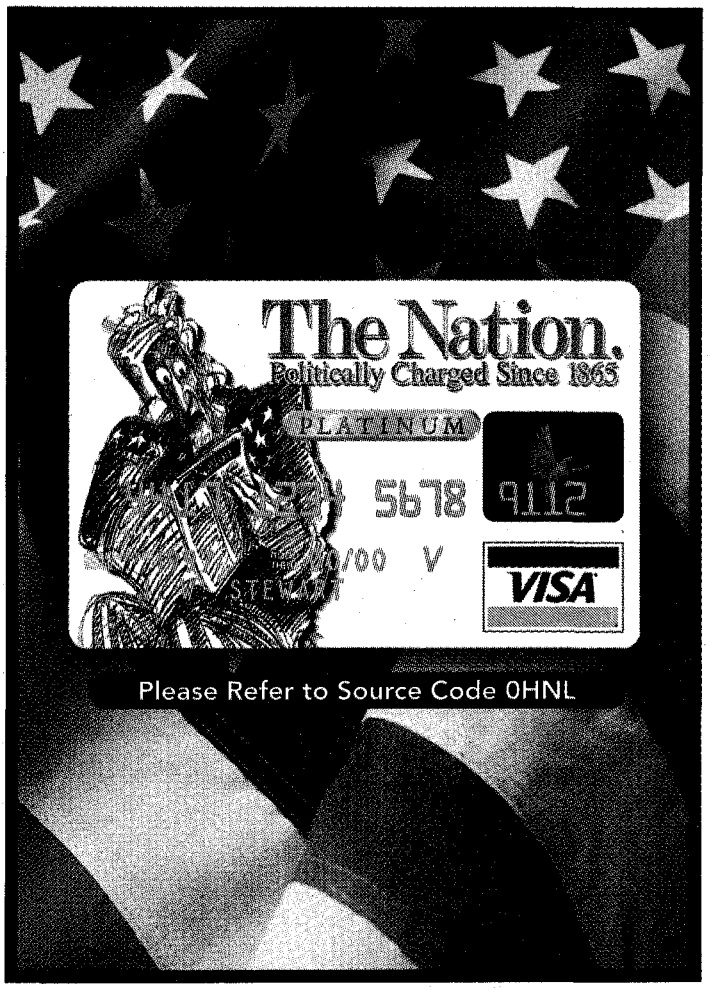

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intend to stand by and let the NRA be turned into the John Birch Society and made irrelevant," LaPierre told the *New York Times*. "It must stay positioned in the mainstream."

At a subsequent annual convention, Heston ran for the board as a LaPierre ally, and over the past three years LaPierre and Heston have managed to purge nearly all of Knox's allies. The *coup de grâce* occurred in April, when Knox himself learned he'd lost his bid to be re-elected. In 1998 LaPierre fired Tanya Metaksa and brought back the savvy and well-connected Baker, a move that draws grudging praise from gun-control activists. "I was very sorry when I saw he was back," says Mike Beard, president of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. "He knows the territory, he knows the people." After the Columbine shootings, Baker engineered an alliance between DeLay, the Republican leader, and Democratic Congressman John Dingell, a former NRA board member, that stifled the gun-control legislation. "He is a legislative genius, with what he pulled off with the Dingell amendment," says Kristin Rand of the Violence Policy Center. "He is just a brilliant lobbyist."

'Gun control is for the right what prayer in school is for the left...an issue where intensity trumps preference.'
—Grover Norquist

Having gradually righted itself financially through belt-tightening and careful management, and having put in place a smoother Washington team, the NRA was poised to take perverse advantage of the post-Columbine environment. As President Clinton pressed for a package of modest gun-control measures—cracking down on unrestricted sales of firearms at gun shows, mandating trigger locks on weapons and so forth—the NRA went into high gear. Through mailings, phone banks and point-of-sale recruitment at gun dealerships and shows, the NRA's characteristically overheated rhetoric began to win converts by the fistful. (One example from a recent NRA letter: "You and I are now making history in the final, decisive battle for the future of our precious Second Amendment freedoms.... Al Gore intends to force every American gun owner to carry a national ID card. He didn't exactly say tattoo a number on your forearm, but you get the idea.") Membership soared, with as many as 600,000 people sending in their $25 dues. At the height of the war of words between LaPierre and Clinton in March, the NRA added 70,000 new members in a week.

Now the NRA is preparing to mobilize its members for a massive get-out-the-vote effort on behalf of Bush and the GOP Congress in November. Organizing that effort is Chuck Cunningham, a former Christian Coalition official, who claims to have signed up 280,000 election volunteers.

What gives the NRA special clout is its ability to coordinate with fifty-four affiliated groups in all fifty states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, scores of smaller state and local pro–Second Amendment organizations, and hundreds of gun clubs nationwide. The Illinois State Rifle Association, for example, an NRA state affiliate, has 10,000 active members, complementing the NRA's 140,000 statewide members. According to Jim Vinopal, who heads the ISRA's political action committee, the group has countywide branches organized in about half of Illinois's 102 counties. "We're organized all the way down to the local level, and most of the groups are affiliated with the NRA," he says. "For instance, in my town of Downers Grove, west of Chicago, I belong to the Downers Grove Citizens for Responsible Firearms Ownership, which has about 200 members." At a moment's notice, volunteers can be turned out to put up signs, ring doorbells or visit the State Capitol. Last fall, hundreds of activists turned out for a pair of lobby days, he says.

Similarly, in Michigan, long an NRA stronghold, the statewide NRA-affiliated Michigan Rifle & Pistol Association sits atop a web of allied organizations. Robert Mark O'Donnell, a policeman who serves as its legislative vice president, is also treasurer of Michigan Citizens for Responsible Gun Ownership's education foundation. "We're all brothers in arms," says O'Donnell. Statewide, the Rifle & Pistol Association has 1,200 members, the Citizens group 3,200, while the NRA has more than 100,000 statewide. "As the election nears, the telephone calls and mailings will start, beginning with volunteers who will network out," says O'Donnell. "Believe me, there has never been a motivation like this since I can remember. It has never been more clear. Gore is for gun registration, and the next step is gun confiscation."

Because of the AFL-CIO's organizational strength in the industrial heartland, the NRA is especially important to the Republican Party, given the NRA's appeal to pro-gun union members. "This is the one thing that will spin the blue-collar union member away from his union," says Knox. Gun-control activists agree. "For the Republicans, the NRA plays a somewhat similar role to labor on the Democratic side," says Mark Pertschuk of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence.

"Gun control is for the right what prayer in school is for the left," says Grover Norquist, the conservative activist and president of Americans for Tax Reform, who is running for the NRA's board this year. "It is an issue where intensity trumps preference." Though most voters back gun control, says Norquist, their support doesn't move them to the polls. "But for that 4–5 percent who care about guns, they will vote on this," he says, harking back to 1994. "Like moths to a flame, the Democrats keep coming back to guns," he says. "It is my favorite issue in the world."

Kellyanne Fitzpatrick, a conservative pollster, says that Gore will have difficulty using the gun issue to mobilize Democratic voters, while the NRA can easily bring its core constituency to the polls in November. "It's a galvanizing issue for people who are gun owners," she says. By focusing attention on guns this year, Clinton and Gore might be able to rouse certain voters, especially suburban women, Fitzpatrick says, but she questions whether, in the end, those voters can be sufficiently motivated to get out and vote against Bush. "They might be able to wake up a sleeping dog here and there, but it's up to Gore to make that dog growl and bite," she says. "Wake up and drool is not enough."

But Celinda Lake, the Democratic pollster, thinks the Republicans will get bitten this year. Thanks to the outrage over Columbine, the intensity among anti-gun voters is as powerful as that on the other side. "What our data show is that single-issue gun-control voters for the first time equal pro-gun voters," she says.

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"There's been a fundamental paradigm shift among women." In a poll for the Pennsylvania legislature conducted by Lake last June, she says, she found that "single-issue pro-gun-control voters outnumber single-issue anti-gun-control voters two to one."

Of course, Republicans and the NRA cite polls showing the opposite to be true. Chris Paulitz, spokesman for the Republican National Committee, notes data showing that voters in an ABC News poll preferred Bush to Gore on guns 47–41 percent. Asked whether the GOP is concerned about being too closely tied to the NRA, Paulitz said: "Why would we back off? We've always gotten money from the NRA. The NRA is an easy target for the Democrats, and they try to equate them with the devil."

However, data like Lake's—and evidence of widespread public anxiety about guns—have clearly emboldened Clinton and Gore to seek to portray Bush and the Republican Party as tools of the NRA. When LaPierre served as co-chairman of a $15 million fundraiser for the GOP in Washington in late April, the Gore campaign lambasted the Texan for associating himself with the gun lobby. "So much for George W. Bush's moderate makeover," said Gore's spokesman. "He has rushed from the warm embrace of Bob Jones and straight into the arms of the NRA." Clinton crisscrossed the country in March and April hammering away at the NRA, and Gore has shown every intention of making guns a central theme of his attack against the Texas Governor.

'Why would we back off? We've always gotten money from the NRA.'
—Chris Paulitz, GOP National Committee

In the Midwest there is mounting evidence that the NRA might be playing a losing hand. Last May their top priority in the states—passing laws that allow citizens to carry concealed weapons—ran aground in two key battleground states. In Missouri, despite a multimillion-dollar NRA campaign, voters rejected the "concealed carry" referendum 52 to 48, while in Michigan a coalition of gun-control groups, public health organizations and law enforcement persuaded Governor John Engler, a Republican, that a concealed-carry law passed by the state legislature was better left unsigned. Both were huge defeats for the NRA. In other Midwest states moderate Republican governors have resisted the NRA's pet issues. In Illinois, Governor George Ryan was elected to office in 1998 over an NRA-backed Democrat in a race in which gun control played the pivotal role. And, even in conservative Ohio, Governor Bob Taft is backing a safe-storage requirement for guns in the home, a bill that has been dubbed "Taft's Burglar Protection Bill" by an angry NRA.

In House races, too, there are signs that the NRA may be less than successful this year. Ever since Columbine, many Republicans from suburban and swing districts in California, the Midwest and the Northeast have been caught between their party's allegiance to the NRA and growing anti-gun sentiment in their districts. Two Republican House members quite visibly caught in the vise are James Rogan, an embattled conservative from Southern California who, after voting with the NRA, has flip-flopped to become a supporter of gun control, and Tom Tancredo, an ultraconservative lawmaker whose district includes Littleton, Colorado. Even pro-gun Democrats may be worried: In California veteran Congressman and NRA member Matthew Martinez lost his primary—in which he had heavy backing from the NRA—to State Senator Hilda Solis, who was backed by Handgun Control and spotlighted guns as an issue.

In the Midwest, a key district could be Ohio's 12th, an open seat created by the retirement of Republican Congressman John Kasich. Mary Ellen O'Shaughnessy, a Democrat contesting that seat, plans to make gun control an issue in her race against Pat Tiberi, a state legislator who supports the NRA's concealed-carry bill. Signaling that pro-gun voters don't automatically have the advantage anymore in a district that has historically been safe for the NRA, Tiberi says, "I don't believe that the issue will end up helping one candidate or the other."

But the ultimate winner—or loser—over guns will be Bush, whose record in Texas ties him firmly to the pro-gun side of the political equation. The NRA has already virtually endorsed Bush, but some wonder whether Bush will eventually move to create some distance between himself and the organization. Phil Journey, a former NRA board member and Republican activist in Kansas, is one who thinks the NRA's high-profile battle with President Clinton could hurt Bush. "It would be much better for George W. Bush if the issue doesn't come up in the national election," says Journey. "The NRA's game of chicken may cost them in the fall. Picking this fight now has the potential to activate the base of gun-control supporters."

Stuart Rothenberg, an independent political analyst, thinks that if Bush is seen as beholden to the NRA it could not only put him in an awkward position but could also create problems for Republicans in close House races. "If Bush were actually painted that way, it might hurt down-ballot Republicans, even in the suburbs," he says. One candidate aware of exactly that danger is Mark Kirk, a Republican running for Congress in Illinois's 10th district, in Chicago. Kirk, like his Democratic opponent, Lauren Beth Gash, is a strong supporter of gun control, and he is at pains to distance himself from the GOP's embrace of the NRA. "There are two key issues on which I will be disagreeing with the leaders of my party: on choice and on guns," he says. But he acknowledges that Gash will try to hang the NRA-Republican alliance around his neck.

There are already signs that the NRA might understand and be responding to the problem. Reuters reported on March 31: "Charlton Heston said...gun control would not become a hot-button issue in the 2000 election, which he said was the most important in at least 100 years. 'I don't think it's going to be as important an issue as people think,' Heston told reporters." Such a low-key approach would not be without precedent. Indeed, in recent years the NRA has frequently spent millions of dollars in advertising for and against various candidates for Congress without mentioning guns at all, choosing instead to emphasize issues like crime, taxes or family values. Neal Knox suggests that by being too public the NRA risks activating its opponents. "If the NRA is too open in its activity, it's going to be energizing to the other side," says Knox. "Since it's been demonized, I don't think the NRA is going to be so visible in statewide independent expenditures. We'll do independent expenditures in certain Congressional districts,

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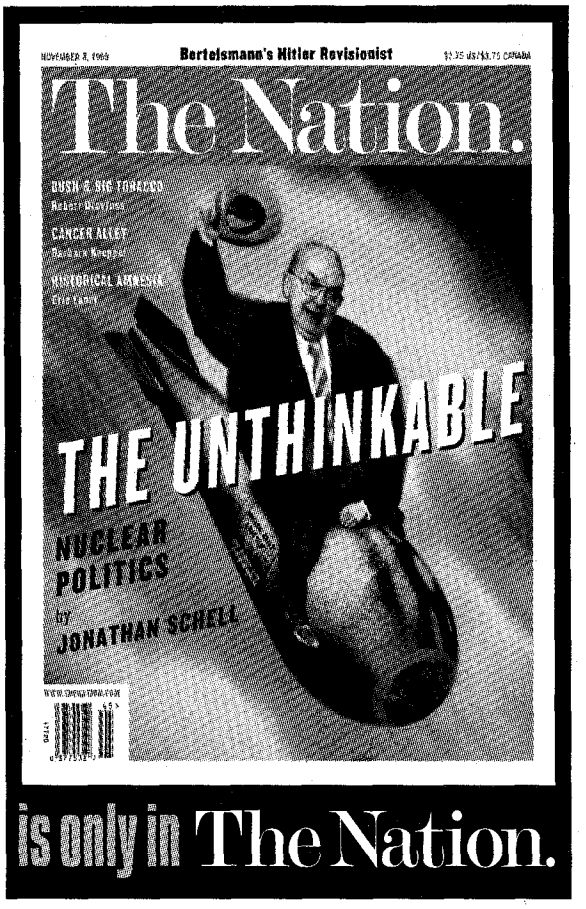

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but only in areas where it won't be counterproductive."

One recent California race offers evidence of the NRA's stealth approach. In that contest, the NRA sought, unsuccessfully, to defeat a longtime anti-gun state senator in the Democratic primary in March. The NRA urged its members to volunteer to help the opposing Democrat—but to do so secretly. "Do not let on that you are associated with the NRA," said a memo circulated among pro-gun activists. "Keep the NRA hats and sweatshirts at home.... If our help were widely known, it would stimulate the Democrats.... Do not talk to anyone in the press about this."

In the end, this year will be a test of whether the NRA can maintain some semblance of its new sophistication or, in the heat of battle, will revert to its former fringe-dwelling. So far, the organization has chosen to emphasize a fairly moderate-sounding theme: that the United States needs no new gun laws, but instead ought to enforce existing ones. Although the Justice Department fiercely disputes charges that it's failed to enforce gun laws, and although gun-control activists point out the obvious need for tougher laws restricting firearms, the NRA's mantra is being echoed now by Bush and other pro-gun Republicans, giving them an easy response when asked about gun-control legislation. And anti-gun activists believe that unlike past years, the NRA will give a pass to embattled Republicans seeking re-election even if they stray from pro-gun orthodoxy, sacrificing purity for the larger goal of keeping GOP control of the House.

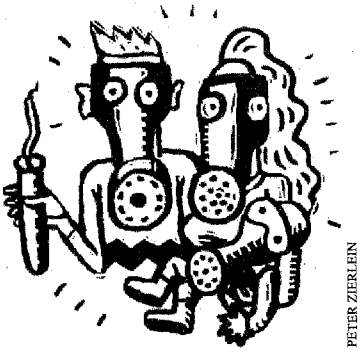
Still, the NRA is facing a political climate that has changed radically since 1994, the organization's previous high-water mark. The "angry white man" of the early nineties has given way to the "soccer mom." The gun-control movement, which for years has lacked a grassroots base, is seeing the emergence of a fledgling network of state and local groups that can organize anti-gun voters and get them to the polls. City attorneys and trial lawyers have thrown gunmakers on the defensive by a wave of liability lawsuits. And with each outbreak of high-profile gun violence, the number of voters intent on voting out NRA-backed lawmakers increases. This could be the year that politicians, Republicans and Democratic alike, learn that they don't have to be afraid of the NRA anymore. ■

OUTRAGED BY PCB CONTAMINATION, AN ALABAMA TOWN UNEARTHS A COMPANY'S PAST.

What Monsanto Knew

NANCY BEILES

In a small brick house strung year-round with Christmas lights, behind curtains made of flowered sheets, Jeremiah Smith is listening to his favorite preacher on the radio. As tonight's installment of the Gospels winds down, Smith, who has warm brown eyes and a shock of graying black hair, takes a seat at a table draped with a zebra-print cloth and piled high with papers and drifts back thirty years, to the brief period when he was a hog farmer. Like others in Anniston, Alabama, an industrial town with rural traditions, Smith used to raise vegetables and livestock in his yard to provide additional food for his family. "We were poor people," he says in a thick drawl. "We had to raise food ourselves.... We were trying to survive and live."



PETER ZIERLEIN

Smith planted potatoes and greens in his backyard. He also had a cow and rabbits, but most of his time and attention went to his hogs. In 1970 he had about fifty—too many for his small plot of land, so he led them, Pied Piper–like, past the old Bethel Baptist Church, the Lucky-7 Lounge and the labyrinth of pipes and smokestacks that surrounded the Monsanto chemical plant his father helped build, to a grassy hill where they could graze. Each evening before heading off to work the night shift at a pipe company, Smith would check on them, give them some feed and, when the need arose, he'd bring home some bacon.

One night, as he was feeding the hogs, a man from the Monsanto plant drove up the hill in a flatbed truck and made him an offer: $10 apiece for the hogs and a bottle of Log Cabin whiskey. The offer was intriguing. Smith had begun to notice that something was wrong with some of his hogs anyway; their mouths had turned green. And Smith, ever in need of cash, could hardly afford to pass up $500. He sold. But for more than twenty years, he wondered what on earth a chemical company would want with his hogs.

Problem: Damage to the ecological system by contamination from polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB).

Legal Liability: Direct lawsuits are possible. The materials are already present in nature having done their "alleged damage." All customers using the products have not been officially notified about known effects nor [do] our labels carry this information. —*Memo from Monsanto committee studying PCBs, 1969*

People Jeremiah Smith's age are old enough to remember Monsanto's glory days in Anniston. The company provided well-paying jobs and helped nurture this friendly Southern town's sense of community. Residents used to marvel at the plant's well-manicured grounds, which the company sometimes let them use for Easter-egg hunts. Most never thought to connect Monsanto to some of the odder features of life in Anniston. Like the creek, known locally as "the ditch," which passed through town carrying water that ran red some days, purple on others and occasionally emitted a foggy white steam.

Nancy Beiles, a reporter at Talk *magazine, lives in Brooklyn.*

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Public Image: The corporate image of Monsanto as a responsible member of the business world genuinely concerned with the welfare of our environment will be adversely affected with increased publicity....

Sources of Contamination: Although there may be some soil and air contamination involved, by far the most critical problem at present is water contamination.... Our manufacturing facilities sewered a sizable quantity of PCB's in a year's time....

—Monsanto committee memo, 1969

Over time, the residents of West Anniston, Alabama, came to believe they had been silently poisoned for decades by Monsanto. Many also believe that if the contamination had occurred in the more affluent (and more heavily white) east side of town, there would have been more scrutiny by the government. The change in attitude was spurred by what at first seemed like a straightforward real estate transaction between Monsanto and a local church.

'PCB is a persistent chemical which builds up in the environment. It, therefore, should not be allowed to escape...' —Monsanto, 1972

In December 1995 Donald Stewart, a former state legislator who served briefly in the US Senate, was taking some time off from his legal practice when he received a phone call from a former client, Andrew Bowie. Bowie, a deacon at the Mars Hill Missionary Baptist Church, explained that a Monsanto manager had approached him about buying the church. "It doesn't seem like we're going to achieve a satisfactory deal," Bowie told Stewart. "I think we need a lawyer." Stewart agreed to help. "I thought it was a simple case," Stewart says. "And then it just mushroomed."

Stewart soon learned that Monsanto wanted to buy the church's property, which was across the street from its plant, because it had discovered high concentrations of PCBs in the area and was planning a cleanup. After an open meeting at the church, Stewart began fielding a flood of calls from concerned residents, who had a dizzying array of health problems they now attribute to the contamination. The neighborhood around the plant is populated by people with cancer, young women with damaged ovaries, children who are learning-impaired and people whose ailments have been diagnosed as acute toxic syndrome. (Medical studies have shown that PCBs cause liver problems, skin rashes and developmental and reproductive disorders in humans. The EPA says that, according to animal studies, they probably cause cancer.) In addition to the church, which filed its own suit against Monsanto, more than 3,000 Anniston residents who have high levels of PCBs in their blood and on their property have filed suit against the company since 1996, alleging that beginning in the sixties, the company knew it was introducing PCBs into the environment, knew the hazards of doing so, failed to inform the community and tried to conceal what it had done.

Monsanto denies the allegations. While it concedes that much of Anniston is contaminated by PCBs, the company says its chemical discharges were negligible—and maintains that it did not fully understand how PCBs affected the environment at the time they were released. "As soon as we discovered there were PCB discharges from the plant, we began our operations to limit and hopefully eliminate those discharges," says Bob Kaley, director of environmental affairs for Monsanto's now spun-off chemical division. "At the time, there were no federal regulations with regard to PCBs.... Everything was done voluntarily, and there was really almost no understanding of the effect of PCBs on the environment and human health." Kaley adds, "I think as we've moved forward in the past thirty years, there are potentially some effects at high levels in the environment. But we do not believe even today that there are concerns for human health at those environmental levels."

The case is beginning to attract the attention of environmental activists, 150 of whom will be taking a bus tour of the contaminated areas this month. The EPA is currently considering whether to order a federally monitored cleanup, and it may declare the area a Superfund site. The likelihood of that is enhanced by PCBs' number-six spot on the agency's list of toxic substances at contaminated sites.

Monsanto lawyers have had plenty of practice defending against liability, since the company has been named as a co-defendant in dozens of PCB suits across the country. The company's track record in court on this front is excellent; while Monsanto has settled a few suits, it has succeeded in getting the vast majority of complaints—most of which have been brought by companies that purchased the chemicals from Monsanto—thrown out by arguing that these companies knew what they were getting into.

But the Anniston case stands out in the annals of PCB litigation in the extent of damage to property and people it alleges. It is also among the first brought by ordinary citizens rather than sophisticated corporations. And this time Monsanto will have to confront its own paper trail in court. The black binders that the plaintiffs' lawyers have stuffed full of internal memorandums and reports, branded "Hot Documents" and "Hottest Documents" with yellow Post-it notes—many of which have never been seen by the public but which will become public record when the trial begins—make this an especially difficult defense to mount.

Karen McFarlane lives in plain view of the plant. It's a mild morning in February, and Karen didn't sleep much last night. Clothed only in a T-shirt and underwear, with a sweater draped over her lap, she lights her first cigarette of the morning—a bent Basic—and promptly drops it on the shaggy blue rug. Dakota, Karen's 16-month-old, is playing with the severed head of a Barbie knock-off and there's not much to eat in the house. But Karen has other worries. Outside, a chain-link fence, six feet high and capped by barbed wire, surrounds the gray Buccaneer trailer where she lives with her husband, Ryan, and their five children, blocking access to gray-green fields once populated by neighbors and small businesses that have been chased away by PCB contamination. "I never thought I'd say it, but I just want to get away from here," says Karen, who has lived in Anniston her whole life.

She has PCBs in her body fat. According to tests done by a local doctor, Ryan's blood has nearly triple the level considered "typical" in the United States; for Tiffany, their 6-year-old, it's double. Nathan, 8, has severe developmental problems, and everyone in the family suffers from respiratory problems and the skin

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rashes associated with PCB exposure. Chris, Karen's 11-year-old son, who's home from school with an upset stomach and is splayed out on the couch, lifts his Panthers basketball T-shirt to reveal brownish-red blotches climbing up the sides of his chest. "It smells like decaying flesh," Ryan warns. "Like it's rotten."

Most of their friends and family have already left, but the McFarlanes can't afford anything other than the small dirt lot where they park their trailer. Karen was recently hospitalized for respiratory-stress disorder and had two strokes at age 30. Her most recent Pap smear was abnormal, but she says she's too scared to have a follow-up exam. Ryan, who has small pink growths dotting his neck, wistfully talks of going to an oncologist for a full cancer screening, something he's unlikely to get soon because he doesn't have health insurance. The McFarlanes are stuck in a place where, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health, cancer rates are 25 percent higher than in the rest of the state.

Anniston was founded as a company town. In 1872, Samuel Noble, a British-born businessman, and Daniel Tyler, a Union general and a cousin of Aaron Burr, established Woodstock Iron in a then-barren outpost at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains. The company built a church, a schoolhouse and a general store. To guarantee the moral fiber of their fabricated utopia, the townspeople threw away their whiskey bottles, declared their own Prohibition and erected a fence around the town's perimeter, creating one of the nation's earliest gated communities. During World War I, chemical producers arrived, and in 1929, the Theodore Swann Company became the nation's first maker of PCBs, nonflammable chemicals that lubricate industrial systems that generate heat. By 1935 the Monsanto Company recognized PCBs as big business and bought Swann's Anniston facility. For close to forty years, Monsanto sold PCBs to companies like General Electric and Westinghouse, helping them insure that webs of electrical wires wouldn't burst into flames.

In the sixties Monsanto encountered a serious threat to its success. While chemical manufacturers throughout the country were scrutinizing the environmental impacts of their products amid growing pressure to reduce emissions, a team of Swedish researchers discovered PCBs in wildlife. For every electrical wire kept from overheating, some of the chemical had been escaping. This discovery, which received wide publicity in 1966, raised concerns for Monsanto, which worried that it would usher in governmental regulations limiting PCB use. "Truly the PCBs are a worldwide ecological problem," declared a company memo that included a list of concerns under the heading "Business Potential at Stake on a Worldwide Basis."

At the time, the government had not yet declared PCBs to be hazardous to human health, but suspicions had been growing for quite a while. As early as 1937 the medical community was examining PCBs to see if they were a public health hazard—a study published that year in the *Journal of Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology* suggested links between PCBs and liver disease. In the mid-fifties Monsanto researchers and executives began writing confidential memos describing their fears about the chemicals' toxic effects, but they drafted plans for continuing to sell them despite these suspicions. In 1956 Monsanto considered the chemicals toxic enough to give workers protective gear and clothing, and encourage them to hose off after each shift. Along with other chemical manufacturers, the company publicly expressed skepticism about PCBs' association with disease, but over the next decade the evidence became harder and harder to dismiss. In 1968 the links between PCBs and disease won wide credibility when residents of a Japanese town were harmed by consuming PCB-contaminated rice oil. Subsequent studies published in leading medical journals showed that PCBs damage the immune system, the reproductive system and the nervous and endocrine systems.

Monsanto had hundreds of millions in PCB sales to lose if regulators placed restrictions on their use. By 1969 the company established a committee to keep abreast of the state of knowledge on PCBs. The issue was beginning to look like "a monster," in the words of one former executive.

> *Make the Govt., States and Universities prove their case, but avoid as much confrontation as possible.... We can prove some things are OK at low concentration. Give Monsanto some defense.... We can't defend vs. everything. Some animals or fish or insects will be harmed.... The Dept. of Interior and/or state authorities could monitor plant outfall and find [discharges] of chlorinated biphenyls at...Anniston anytime they choose to do so. This would shut us down depending on what plants or animals they choose to find harmed....*
>
> *—Monsanto researcher, September 1969*

At issue in the lawsuit is whether the company was aware of the extent of the PCB contamination and whether it could have protected or warned the community. Many of the answers may be found in the documents.

In the late sixties Monsanto began keeping track of its PCB discharges in an attempt to reduce emissions. According to the company's July 1970 progress report, Monsanto was dumping about sixteen pounds a day of PCB waste into the town's waterways. It was a significant amount, but in the closed world of Monsanto executives, it almost seemed like good news—the year before, the company had been dumping about 250 pounds a day.

Monsanto went on the offensive, reporting to regulators at the now-defunct Alabama Water Improvement Commission that it was finding PCBs in the water near the plant. But the regulators, according to a company memo, agreed that "all written effluent level reports would be held confidential by the technical staff and would not be available to the public unless or until Monsanto released it." Monsanto never did.

To predict whether federal or state regulators would find the chemicals to be a threat to the environment or human health, Monsanto began commissioning animal toxicity studies; the results, in the early seventies, didn't look good. "Our interpretation is that the PCBs are exhibiting a greater degree of toxicity in this study than we had anticipated.... We have additional interim data which will perhaps be more discouraging," a company executive wrote. "We are repeating some of the experiments to confirm or deny the earlier findings and are not distributing the early results at this time."

Testing continued, but the results didn't get any better. In 1975 the lab submitted its findings from a two-year study of PCBs' effects on rats. An early draft of the report said that in some cases, PCBs had caused tumors. George Levinskas, Monsanto's

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manager for environmental assessment and toxicology, wrote to the lab's director: "May we request that the [PCB] 1254 report be amended to say 'does not appear to be carcinogenic.'"

The final report adopted the company's suggested language and dropped all references to tumors.

Anniston residents got their first glimpse of Monsanto's troubles with PCBs in late 1993. A contractor doing dredging work on the nearby Choccolocco Creek noticed largemouth bass with blistered scales. Tests showed the fish contained extremely high levels of PCBs. Around the same time, the Alabama Power Company broke ground on land it had acquired from Monsanto in the sixties, opening up a PCB landfill that bled black tar. Alabama Power insisted that Monsanto take back the land and reported its discovery to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. Testing ordered by ADEM and carried out by Monsanto found that a wide swath of West Anniston and local waterways were highly contaminated with PCBs. Soon after, the company made its quiet buyout offer to the church.

Around the Monsanto plant live people with cancer, damaged ovaries, learning impairments and acute toxic syndrome.

The contamination came as news to residents, but Donald Stewart quickly discovered that Monsanto had known about it for decades. "There have been some big bonanzas," Stewart says of the internal company documents he has collected. "Someone's going to have to sit down somewhere in the bowels of that company and make it right."

Since Stewart had never handled a case like this before, he enlisted the help of a Mississippi firm and Kasowitz, Benson, Torres & Friedman, a New York firm that represented Liggett in the tobacco suits. Even with all that legal firepower, Stewart still has a formidable task ahead. "It just seems these folks have the skill and the capability to avoid having somebody pin the tail on their donkey. I mean, they've just been able to walk away from it," he says. "I can't wait to get before a jury to say, 'Well, this is what happened.' I'm looking forward to hearing how they're going to explain this away."

> *Early in 1970, we established a target of 10 ppb [parts per billion] of PCBs in our plant waste streams which we expected to achieve by the third quarter 1971. No specific target was established for the quantity of PCBs we could tolerate in the atmosphere. During the year as the plant gained tighter control of known sources of PCB pollution, it became increasingly obvious that the high levels would continue because of the PCBs trapped in the soil and in the sewer systems. Clean-up of these sources can be economically impractical.*
>
> *—Former Monsanto plant manager, January 1971*

Adam Peck, one of Monsanto's lawyers, isn't sweating it. The company, which spun off its chemical division as a standalone firm, Solutia, in 1997, assigned an environmental manager to lead a $30 million cleanup focusing on everything from a landfill where 150–200 million pounds of PCB waste are buried to waterways and contaminated land in the neighborhood. Beginning with the Mars Hill church, the company began buying out small businesses and residents in West Anniston. They bulldozed buildings, laid thick plastic tarps over the contaminated soil and covered them with clean soil. The company plans to convert some of the contaminated land into a wildlife refuge. It has built perching posts near the landfill to attract purple martins, and recently released salamanders into a pond that catches runoff water from the landfill.

In Peck's mind, these activities demonstrate convincingly that the corporation has behaved responsibly. "Our position is that when a jury hears all the evidence they will conclude that Monsanto and Solutia acted responsibly in the manufacture of PCBs and in efforts to remediate," he says. "I think liability will be for a jury to determine. We have offered to acquire property. We've offered to clean property. What does that mean? Does that mean we acted responsibly or that we should have done more?" After a pause, he adds, "I'm not sure what more we could have done."

Peck says Monsanto didn't notify the community about the PCB releases years ago because at the time there wasn't sufficient understanding of how the chemicals migrated through the environment. Yet one of the documents Stewart obtained, a sample Q&A on PCBs produced by Monsanto for its customers in 1972, reads in part: "PCB is a persistent chemical which builds up in the environment. It, therefore, should not be allowed to escape to the environment." Peck continues: "And if you think about it from the perspective of the plant manager and the folks who were there at the time, the levels that were escaping the plant were extremely small compared to the levels that those guys were working with on a daily basis. They weren't worried for their own health. Why should they be thinking the minute levels that are escaping are of any concern to anybody outside there?" The protective gear worn by workers, Peck insists, was simply routine.

Ryan McFarlane is lumbering across the dirt lot outside his trailer. Overweight and easily winded, he moves slowly past a broken trampoline to a set of wire pens that house his chickens. Undersized and lethargic, they huddle in the corners of the rusty pens, occasionally exhaling a thin cluck. For years, Ryan raised chickens for food. But these days, knowing they are probably contaminated, and since his health problems have kept him from working for the past five years, Ryan keeps chickens around to give him something to do.

Until the PCB contamination came to light, the McFarlanes, like many of their friends and former neighbors, regularly ate fish from the creeks, and chicken and vegetables raised in their yards. They might have given the practice up long before if Monsanto had told Jeremiah Smith in 1970 when it bought his hogs that it made the purchase because it was worried that people were eating PCB-contaminated pork. (Monsanto admits that the hogs were later shot and buried, although the company contends that its concern about PCB contamination was secondary to its concern about the hogs' trespassing on its property.) The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a division of the US Department of Health and Human Services, completed a health study in Anniston in February, which found

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that PCB exposure in the town is a public health hazard. It also suggested that eating local pork, fish and chicken has been a major source of PCB contamination. The EPA says eating PCB-contaminated food is one of the most dangerous means of exposure because PCBs biomagnify, or increase in intensity, as they travel up the food chain.

Residents are anxiously awaiting the EPA's decision on whether to order a federal cleanup. "All they want to do, seem like, is study, study, study, we got to study some more," says one plaintiff in the case. The lawsuit is also taking longer than residents anticipated. Two weeks before the case was to go to trial, in March 1999, Monsanto appealed to the state Supreme Court to establish procedural rules for the circuit court. Now, more than a year later, the Court still hasn't returned its rulings. In the meantime, Stewart prepares for trial and works on other cases. He's hoping the jury will award compensatory damages for the property contamination and punitive damages for the fear the exposure has engendered. He also wants Monsanto to pay for regular health screenings. Early settlement talks went nowhere, both sides say.

Monsanto did settle the original suit on behalf of the Mars Hill congregation. It made no admission of guilt but paid $2.5 million to rebuild the church at another location. "In the Mars Hill case they protested all the time that they didn't do a thing," Stewart says. "Then they paid $2.5 million for a church they said was worth $400,000. Sounds like they did something, to me. Now, I'm just a small-town country lawyer, but I wonder how they arrived at that decision." ■

A NEW PUBLIC-FUNDING LAW HAS PROMPTED MANY REFORMERS TO RUN FOR OFFICE.

Clean Money in Maine

MARC COOPER

Steep Falls, Maine

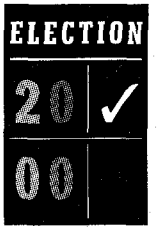
Thirty-four-year-old wife, mother and small-business woman Sue Hawes hardly seems to fit the standard profile of a serious state legislative candidate. A former social worker with a husband on disability and a small child, she has a fledgling Internet business that provides just enough income for her family to get by in this low-cost rural corner of the state. The household budget is so tight she can't afford health insurance.

PETER ZIERLEIN

She has few establishment contacts, and her outspoken populist politics would more likely alienate than lure the typical campaign underwriter—Hawes is a well-known community activist who fights for universal healthcare, a living wage and "corporate accountability"; her wrangling with developers and clearcutters recently won her an Activist of the Year award from the Northern Forest Alliance. So Hawes figures she might have been able to raise $1,000, at best, for a campaign that is likely to cost ten to fifteen times that amount.

But thanks to implementation of Maine's Clean Elections Act, Hawes, running unopposed in June's Democratic primary for a seat in the state House, will go on in November to pose a serious threat to her GOP rival—serious enough that she could win. And she'll do it all without having to raise five red cents from powerful special interests. Under the terms of the act, and because Hawes was able to gather minimal qualifying signatures, the State of Maine will provide her with as much as $12,000 in public funds to carry out her campaign—a generous amount for her small district of just a couple of thousand voters. In return, Hawes has pledged to "run clean": to raise no other outside funding and to put no personal money into her campaign. To qualify for the public funding, Hawes had to collect signatures from fifty registered voters in her district who were willing to write $5 checks—not to her but to the Maine Clean Election Fund. If she had run for state Senate she would have had to gather 150 qualifying checks and would have been eligible for nearly $40,000 in public funding. "No way I could have done this without the Clean Elections law," Hawes says from across her dining-room table. "I'm totally free to spend all my time talking to voters about the issues."

Maine was the first state to pass comprehensive campaign finance reform with full public funding (since then, Vermont, Massachusetts and Arizona have adopted similar measures). Several years of diligent organizing by Northeast Action's Money and Politics Project, working closely with Maine's progressive Dirigo Alliance, culminated in the 1996 passage of the Clean Elections initiative, which won by a 56–44 margin. With this year's election cycle, Maine's law finally goes into effect. The result is a radical experiment in American electoral politics: 115 state legislative candidates, a full third of the total running, are running clean.



The new law is appealing to all types of candidates who, for myriad reasons, are tired of the relentless traditional hunt for deep-pockets backers. They include incumbents and challengers, high-powered mainstream candidates as well as more grassroots insurgents and minor-party standard-bearers—and even some of the measure's most strident former opponents. Beverly Daggett, an incumbent Democratic legislator who was the lead plaintiff in an unsuccessful lawsuit against the Clean Elections law, is now enthusiastically accepting public funding for this

Marc Cooper, a Nation *contributing editor, is the host of* RadioNation.

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year's run. So is Norm Ferguson, a Republican Senate incumbent who so vociferously opposed the initiative that he sponsored a failed bill to take the word "clean" out of the law. Now he sings the praises of public funding. "I found that people were pretty receptive," he says of his successful quest to gather the $5 seed contributions he needed to qualify for public funding.

But most important, the Clean Elections Act is prying open a traditionally narrow electoral process to a whole pack of progressive, populist and reform candidates who otherwise wouldn't stand a prayer. And for 39-year-old George Christie, one of the original strategists behind the state's clean-money reform, that's exactly the way it was supposed to work. "Lots of people get behind campaign finance reform because they want to clean up government, and that's great," says Christie, who now runs the Dirigo Alliance. "But I always looked at this as a means to open politics up more to average people and their concerns, and ultimately to win power for a more progressive politics. As we elect more clean-money candidates we can more quickly move on corporate accountability, a living wage, universal health insurance, democratic reform of education. Maine supposedly has a 'citizen legislature.' Now, we have a great crop of progressive candidates who have a chance to make it look much more like the citizenry and make it more responsive to the needs of working families."

'It's easy to always lose. But do we have the courage to assume responsibility for trying to win?' —A veteran Green Party strategist

Indeed, it's not just Sue Hawes who's pushing the electoral center of gravity leftward. Apart from four members of Maine's Green Independent Party running clean for the legislature, there are a few dozen publicly funded Democratic candidates who—freed from soliciting campaign contributions—are pushing the ideological envelope. "I'm absolutely on the left side of the party," says a smiling 32-year-old Kelly Ann Staples, a single mother scraping by on an Americorps grant who is running clean as a Democrat for the Statehouse. Like Hawes, and like a surprising number of other clean-money candidates, Staples puts universal healthcare at the top of her agenda. Like Hawes, she cannot afford health insurance for herself or her two children.

The clean-election law "opens up the process and opens up the dialogue," says another progressive Democratic House challenger, 47-year-old Shlomit Auciello. "I wouldn't have known where to even begin raising the money to run." She adds, "But now just running clean in itself gives me something to open up my discussion with voters. I start with campaign finance reform. And when I explain how I'm running, people get excited. I've got people voting for me now who haven't voted since 1982."

Hawes, Staples and Auciello all at least thought about running as Greens. Auciello is a former Green activist but became disenchanted with what she considered that party's inability to conduct serious organizing campaigns. Both Hawes and Staples have recently voted Green and have closer ties to that party than to the Democrats. Indeed, some Greenish candidates, now seeing electoral victory as a real possibility, have opted to improve their odds further by relying on the more solid infrastructure of the Democrats. "I would have preferred to run as a Green," says Hawes. "But they just don't have as big a support system as I will get from the Democrats: voter databases, volunteers and so on. It was a tough decision. But I went for the Democrats."

Hawes's dilemma, to go Green or Democrat, underlines the fact that while comprehensive campaign finance reform creates the possibility of enhanced insurgent campaigns (either inside or outside the Democratic Party), it is not, by itself, a silver bullet. For third-party efforts, there are also the inevitable ballot-access hurdles to overcome—not to mention voter consciousness. Take the case of the Green Party, which has twice run gubernatorial candidates who have won 6–9 percent of the vote. After the Clean Elections Act passed, the party put out an exuberant press release proclaiming that, thanks to public funding, it would now field candidates in some fifty of the state's 186 legislative districts.

But when qualifying deadlines for this election cycle expired in mid-March, there were only four Green candidates. Part of the problem was steep ballot-access rules that require House and Senate candidates to get twenty-five and 100 signatures, respectively, from registered voters within their own party and district (the signatures needed for clean-money qualification can be from any party). "Getting 100 Green signatures was very tough for me, and I come from a part of the state where we have our highest numbers," says 29-year-old Matt Scease, who is making a run for the Senate. One veteran Green strategist, who wants to stay anonymous, adds that the clean-elections process now confronts his party with as much of a challenge as an opportunity. "It's easy to always lose," he says. "But do we have the courage to assume responsibility for trying to win?"

The reformed process also confronts other potentially key progressive groups with new decisions. Organized labor in Maine, for example, has shown its willingness to stray from the Democratic establishment on occasion and support insurgents. But will it now, in targeted races where the Democrat is antilabor, support a publicly financed Green or other candidate who will have the money to run a serious campaign? Matt Scease's campaign will be an interesting test. His conservative GOP opponent has an abominable labor record. His Democratic rival is a mere ballot-line placeholder who will not seriously campaign. For the unions that represent the 7,600 workers at the historic Bath Iron Works in Scease's district, endorsing Scease should be a no-brainer. And yet, that labor support is still far from certain. "Too often we have argued that we need only reform the system and everything will fall into place," says the veteran Green organizer. "And we too often forget about that small thing called political consciousness."

Some potential candidates were wary about being guinea pigs for an untested system, but thanks to the clean-money law there are already more competitive primaries this year than there were two years ago. An even greater number of contenders is expected in 2002, in part because some initial polling indicates that clean candidates have a definite edge over "dirty" ones. Popular support for the system has also increased: A higher percentage of Maine citizens now check off a donation to the Clean Election Fund on their tax return than do those for the federal election fund.

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Also in 2002, the clean-money law kicks in for the gubernatorial race, providing some $700,000 for qualifying candidates. Already, progressive groups like Dirigo are focusing on a short list of possible contenders. Says Green Senate candidate Scease, "We are going to need a lot of qualifying signatures. But what a great party-building tool it will be to dig out and sign up all those names. And how exciting it will be to see the playing field leveled out by Clean Elections. It's in the big, expensive gubernatorial race where you see the biggest money gap. A real challenge from us in 2002 could be the real political earthquake."

In the meantime, political reformers will be carefully assessing each tremor radiating out from Maine's new process. Already, unsuccessful court challenges brought by a strange coalition of antiabortion groups and the Maine Civil Liberties Union have set important national precedents. The federal courts upheld the principle that public funding could be given in exchange for not raising money from other sources. "More important, the court said it was fair to provide additional matching public funds when a clean-money candidate is outspent," says John Brautigam, executive director of the Maine Citizens Leadership Fund. "This is a crucial precedent for other states."

In the wake of John McCain's presidential primary campaign, the issue of campaign finance reform resonates more than ever. "We're excited by what's happening in Maine, because now Clean Money is no longer an abstraction," says Nick Nyhart, executive director of Public Campaign, the Washington, DC–based group spearheading clean-money reform. "And this is motivating people across the spectrum who believe in strengthening grassroots politics." He adds, "Our biggest challenge now is fanning the flames so that Congress starts feeling the heat."

This November, voters in Missouri and Oregon will vote on clean-money initiatives, and in both cases the initiatives are leading in the polls. In Connecticut a similar measure was recently approved by both houses of the legislature—an enormous achievement, given how hard it is to get incumbents to rewrite the rules of their own game—but the bill was vetoed by Governor John Rowland earlier this month. In North Carolina, statewide support for a pending clean-election bill is rapidly building.

Reformers are still confounded over how to get this issue to "break out" nationally and take root in large industrialized states in the Rust Belt or in big-money swamps like California. In the March primary election, voters in that state rejected by a 2-to-1 margin a partial public-funding scheme proposed by conservative Ron Unz. Although it was supported by numerous liberals, including State Senator Tom Hayden, the Unz proposal fell far short of the sort of sweeping reform approved in Maine and suffered from severe internal campaign deficiencies. Now, Public Campaign is in the very earliest stages of exploring how the pieces of reform might be picked up in that crucial state.

"It's only a matter of time before the growth and excitement at the state level forces change in Congress," says Nyhart of Public Campaign. "The success of Maine and other states teaches us that we can win. And as the problem of money in politics keeps getting worse, we keep winning new allies to the cause." ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

mative. The Steven Seagal quotes alone made my month. If only Courtney Love could have put in an appearance—in between punching out reporters, cameramen and fellow musicians. My only regret is that Schell didn't manage to shoehorn in a mention of the Dalai Lama's stand on homosexuality and, really, sexuality in general—one that seems inconsistent with his lectures on tolerance. He writes in *Beyond Dogma*: "A sexual act is deemed proper when the couples use the organs created for sexual intercourse and nothing else. To have sexual relations with a prostitute paid by you and not by a third person does not, on the other hand, constitute improper behavior.... Homosexuality, whether it is between men or between women, is not improper in itself. What is improper is the use of organs already defined as inappropriate for sexual contact."

PAUL ASHBY

Bridgewater, N.J.

■ "Independent film" has become a code for "arthouse picture." The audience for arthouse fare has barely budged in recent years despite all the hype by film critics and the trend toward mega-plex theaters (as defined by *Variety*, any theater with sixteen or more screens). Greg Merritt has come up with the only accurate definition of independent film—which means *The Sixth Sense* and *Star Wars: Episode 1* are independent films. Also, despite what Stuart Klawans wrote, several movies of late from the big studios have been given an arthouse-style release, including *The Straight Story*, *Liberty Heights*, *Cradle Will Rock*, *The End of the Affair* (to an extent) and *The Big Tease*.

CHARLES EVERETT

E. Lansing, Mich.

■ I ran an "art" theater from 1990 to 1998. We were a marginal business (two hits to five flops), and then the shopping center decided to reinvent itself. Looked like a bomb hit it. Business was down 67 percent, and I asked for a reduction in rent. They issued an eviction notice instead. I pointed out that we were a "magnet store"—people came to us from twenty, thirty, forty miles away. I had stashed $800 to pay taxes. The shopping center took it for back rent. It never went to court. I would have said, "Look, they owe *us* money. For eight years I paid for maintenance and security and never got any." Guess who financed this "progress." The National Bank of Detroit—the same bank I was using! Guess who signed my petition for maintenance and security—NBD. Guess who the city of Lansing is still after for back taxes—me. My space is now a Chinese restaurant. It was unable to open for five months. I asked them how they survived. They replied, "Oh we have relatives in Taiwan." FRANK J. LEAHEY

Stockholm

■ I know this puts me in the minority, but I am so sick of hearing about movies! Wherever you go, it seems like 80 percent of conversation is people retelling the movies they saw. I resent the dominance of such an expensive art form, and I'm appalled at the amount of space it takes up in the collective consciousness. Like US two-party politics, movies monopolize center stage and then do very little with it, except to keep us all occupied so that we lose most of our awareness of, and feeling for, the things that individuals and small groups of friends can do, and are doing, without major financing. When *The Nation* is full of movies too, I want to start looking for a new planet. ANDY FITE

CLARIFICATION

In Liza Featherstone's May 15 "The New Student Movement," it was local civil rights movement veterans, not unions, at Johns Hopkins University who inspired the Black Student Union to join this spring's labor sit-in.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

A Closing of the American Kind

JOHN LEONARD

RAVELSTEIN.
By Saul Bellow.
Viking. 233 pp. $24.95.

You will recall that when Augie March went to Mexico, he hooked up with an eagle, which he called Caligula. (He also ran into Leon Trotsky, navigating "by the great stars." In this, Augie was luckier than his creator, Saul Bellow, who had an appointment in 1940 to see Trotsky on the very morning of his murder and ended up in Coyoacán looking at a corpse: "A cone of bloody bandages was on his head. His cheeks, his nose, his beard, his throat, were streaked with blood and with dried iridescent trickles of iodine." But already I digress.) Suppose that instead of an eagle, Augie had grabbed a parrot, like a bag of Magical Realist feathers, and sneaked it back to Chicago. This might explain the marvel that knocks three times at the stained-glass window of *Ravelstein*.

(1) Abe Ravelstein, a political philosopher just out of intensive care and feeling shaky, is escorted by his friend Chick, a much-married older novelist, from the University of Chicago campus back to his apartment, stopping at every other corner to catch his breath. They happen, remarkably, on a flock of parrots in a clump of trees with red berries. Though not really interested in nature, Ravelstein needs to know: "What are we looking at?" Chick explains that the parrots, descendants of an escaped pair of caged birds, first built their long, sacklike nests in the lakefront park and later colonized the alleys; that "hundreds of green parrots" live in "bird tenements" hanging from utility poles; that the new "garbage-based ecology" involves raccoons and even possums, besides your usual rats and squirrels. "You mean," says Ravelstein, "the urban jungle is no longer a metaphor."

(2) Thirty pages later, two years after Abe's death, Chick thinks back to "the morning of the day when he and I had come upon the parrot-filled holly bushes where the birds were feeding on red berries and scattering the snow." He re-experiences his friend's surprise: "You're just back from the dead, and you run into an entire tribe of green parrots, tropical animals surviving a midwestern winter." And this time a grinning Ravelstein is made to say: "They even have a Jew look to them."

(3) Finally, at the end of this lambent novel, this prayer for the dead, Chick seems to be channeling Ravelstein: "He loses himself in sublime music, a music in which ideas are dissolved, reflecting these ideas in the form of feeling. He carries them down to the street with him. There's an early snow on the tall shrubs, the same shrubs filled with a huge flock of parrots—the ones that escaped from cages and now build their long nest sacks in the back alleys. They are feeding on red berries. Ravelstein looks at me laughing with pleasure and astonishment, gesturing because he can't be heard in all this bird-noise."

Ravelstein is the story of two deaths—of the philosopher and the novelist—with only one Lazarus, who isn't Socrates.

By now, Bellow's got it down like a scroll painting or a haiku. Indeed, for all that, *Ravelstein* is spiced with Western Civ's greatest hits—with long views from Athens and Jerusalem, as seen through the eyes of the noble dead (Plato, Rousseau, Nietzsche), the compulsive scribblers (Xenophon, Dr. Johnson, Joyce, Céline), the exemplary-prophetic (Job and Tolstoy) and the merely peculiar (Marie Antoinette and Whittaker Chambers), at whom, because "death does sharpen the comic sense," we are even encouraged to laugh "like Picasso's wounded horse in *Guernica*, rearing back"—there is something oddly Oriental about the novel, as if it were told by an odalisque with a folding fan. Or, to be even fancier, as if it were a series of tai chi exercises, a sequence of strenuous poses. Thus, for Ravelstein's many eccentricities—a white crane flashing its wings. For Chick's many marriages—a master strumming his lute. For the price exacted by world history and personal choice—a wild

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horse shaking its mane. And, for a teller done with his tale, a hunter holding the tail of a bird. ("As birds went," Chick says of Abe, "he was an eagle, while I was something like a flycatcher.")

I'm about to suggest that *Ravelstein* is the story of two deaths—of the philosopher and the novelist—with only one Lazarus, who isn't Socrates. I will argue that as much as Saul Bellow enjoyed the company of Allan Bloom, they had profound differences on how to live and die, what happens afterward and the way we best explain each other. These differences, as much as their friendship, are what animate the novel. They are in fact what make it a novel and not a tacky *roman à clef*, shellacked to fix its gaudy colors. But first the tabloid tease.

Humboldt wanted to drape the world in radiance, but he didn't have enough material.
(Humboldt's Gift)

That Ravelstein is Bloom is obvious not only on the basis of internal evidence—the gift for teaching; the bestselling book; the messy eating habits; the expensive tastes and sexual secrets; gossipy friends in high places; contempt for relativism, feminism, black power, gay pride, the social sciences and rock and roll—but also on the basis of Bellow's own remarks at a memorial service for Bloom in 1992, included in *It All Adds Up* (1994), which reappear here almost word for word. (Mercedes will become BMW, and Michael Wu will become Nikki, and Persian carpets, Chinese chests, Hermes porcelain and Ultimo cashmere coats will turn into Armani suits, Vuitton luggage, Lalique crystal and Cuban cigars, but the chain-smoking, the Chicago Bulls and Plato's *Symposium* remain the same.) That Chick is Saul is equally obvious from the novels, the marriages and the gnarly grain of the prose, plus what we know from the news about Bellow's near death from food poisoning in 1994. Chick even paraphrases a passage in an earlier Bellow novel, *More Die of Heartbreak*, on how he imagines death: "I said that the pictures would stop." Of course, while everybody who ever met him at the University of Chicago knew Bloom to be a gay diva, there's no closet quite like the Committee on Social Thought, and so at the memorial they chose to blame his death on liver failure instead of AIDS.

OK, Abe is Allan, Chick is Saul and we are told in the April *Lingua Franca* that Rakhmiel Kogon is Edward Shills and Radu Grielescu is Mircea Eliade. I am already wise to Vela, the Romanian-born "chaos" physicist who dumps Chick, because I met her before in *The Dean's December*, when she was a Romanian-born astronomer named Minna. Thanks be, she will exit in time to make room for Chick's new wife, Rosamund, about whom there's reason to worry, because if she really was a student of Bloom's, she should be feeling attenuated, if not invisible, since he is said to have looked right through even the brightest of his female students to likelier candidates for his coterie. This still leaves mysterious the secret identities of Battle, the Sanskrit-speaking ex-paratrooper who looks like "the Quaker on the oatmeal box," and of Morris Herbst, who's written a book on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* in spite of his weakness for dice and cards. One supposes we must wait for the infinitely receding James Atlas tell-all bio.

Or maybe not. While sometimes interesting, this piggish snuffling after factoid truffles is usually distracting, approximately as helpful as being told that García Márquez patterned the six chapters of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* on Bartok's six string quartets and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, and invariably reductive in the cranky manner of Ruth Miller's *Saul Bellow: A Biography of the Imagination* (1991), in which she insists that all the novels are autobiographical, cookie-cut to an identical pattern: a family that's a pain. (They may love him, but they don't understand him; he's a spiritual orphan.) Alter egos who are the same compulsively talkative, intellectually alienated, wisecracking, soul-stricken and culture-freaked manic-depressive (Russian-Jewish Chicago street-smarties even when, like Henderson or Corde, they're not supposed to be). And women who do him wrong: "frumps," says Miller, "predators, trollops, cheats, mousies, doxies, harridans, emasculators, manipulators, betrayers, or rigid unyielding martinets, paranoids, dollies, or chumps." (Herzog wonders, "Will I ever understand what women want?... They eat green salad and drink human blood.")

But this is to read each novel as though it were a grudge—a settling of private scores on the reader's time. If you want to know who is (or isn't) Isaac Rosenfeld, Harold Rosenberg, Meyer Schapiro, Dwight Macdonald, John Berryman or R.P. Blackmur—if it matters to you that Joe Alsop is taken in vain in *The Dean's December*—then Miller's where to go. She even interviewed Owen Barfield on anthroposophy. She will explain away *Henderson the Rain King* as a parodic acting-out, in Africa, of the Reichian analysis Bellow submitted to in the mid-fifties, while keeping an orgone box like an aspidistra in his Queens apartment. And explain

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away *Herzog* as the story of ex-wife Sondra and a perfidious Jack Ludwig. And explain away *Humboldt's Gift* as Saul's revenge on crazy Delmore Schwartz, who had accused him of selling out.

All this says zilch about what Bellow *does* to everything he *notices*, the glad coatings he gives to a terrible world, his Jackson Pollock trickles and streaks and spatters, the ciphers he finds, like Mr. Sammler, in straws and spiders, those magic acts of levitating language by which unhappy childhoods, scorched-earth marriages, erotic disasters, intellectual debacles or debauches, a plenitude of feeling, a hunger for transcendence, the death of a friend, the murder of a people or the decline of the West, are transmuted into agencies of sublime awareness. That style—snaky and hot, wrote Cynthia Ozick, "pumping street-smarts into literary blood-vessels," a "profane and holy comedy of dazzling, beating, multiform profusion"; barbed, breezy, dishevelled and surreal; salt-savoring and brain-fevered; the brilliant twitchy patter and the Great Books patois of colloquial and mandarin, sentimental and neo-baroque, Talmudic mutter and gangster slang; deep chords and stop-action; the long irony, the low laugh, the short fuse and a three-cushion bank shot into a side pocket where the anguish they speak is Yiddish—such a style miracle-whips.

Moses Herzog will cry out against "the canned sauerkraut of Spengler's Prussian socialism, the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pip-squeaks about Inauthenticity and Forlornness," and "a merely aesthetic critique of modern history! After the wars and mass killings! You are too intelligent for this. You inherited rich blood. Your father peddled apples." And while we are told in *Humboldt* that "a heart can be fixed like a shoe. Resoled. Even new uppers," that's not what it feels like after we've heard Sorella in *The Bellarosa Connection* explain "the slapstick side" of the death camps:

> Being a French teacher, she was familiar with Jarry and *Ubu Roi*, Pataphysics, Absurdism, Dada, Surrealism. Some camps were run in a burlesque style that forced you to make these connections. Prisoners were sent naked into a swamp and had to croak and hop like frogs. Children were hanged while starved, freezing slave laborers lined up on parade in front of the gallows and a prison band played Viennese light opera waltzes.

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Dear Doktor Professor Heidegger, I should like to know what you mean by the expression "The Fall into the Quotidian." When did this fall occur? Where were we standing when it happened? (Herzog)

But so long as we think of Abe as Allan we are distracted. We are still fighting the Culture Wars, still reviewing *The Closing of the American Mind*. We can't forget that this is the man who accused Louis Armstrong of trashing Weimar, who compared Woodstock to Nuremberg, who fled Ithaca for Hyde Park in the parricidal sixties as if from Pompeii to Atlantis. Wolfpacks of Dread Relativism on dawn patrol! Student power! Student sex! We underline what Ravelstein says about Hayek, Bloomsbury, Islam, the Gulf War, the Grateful Dead, Mrs. Thatcher, the liberal arts and the inner city—"the chaos the life of such people must be," he says after a chat with his cleaning lady; and, "Don't they give those people any training?" after a black nurse mentions in polite company that it's time for his AZT; but what do we expect from Chicago's dark South Side and its "noisy, pointless, nihilistic turmoil"?—as if we were writing articles of impeachment. Surely Saul Bellow, of all people, ought to prize diversity and inclusiveness. In the first twenty-seven pages of *Augie March* alone, mention was made of Heraclitus, *Tom Brown's School Days*, a coat factory, a laundry truck, *Anna Karenina* and Nabisco wafers; popcorn and *Manon Lescaut*, football and Yiddish theater, pickled fish and *The Iliad*. Why, in Ravelstein's Chicago, is it all right to love the Bulls but not the Beatles?

This is a mug's game. As male friendships in American literature go, Chick and Abe may not be in a league with Ishmael and Queequeg, Huck and Jim or Mason and Dixon, but they share a "sense of what was funny... A joyful noise—*immenso giubilo*—an outsize joint agreement picked us up together." You and I might have our doubts about a man who sends his neckties air-express to be laundered by a silk specialist in Paris, who must sleep on Pratesi linens, "under beautifully cured angora skins," and perk himself up in the morning with his very own espresso machine, while listening to eighteenth-century operas on compact disks through hi-fi speakers that cost $10,000 each, before venturing out to spend $4,500 on a Lanvin sports jacket the color of a Labrador retriever, on which he will sprinkle ashes from his incessant cigarettes, while delivering "little anti-sermons in a wacko style" about "mass democracy and its characteristic—woeful—product" or maybe the Treaty of Versailles. You and I might prefer to pledge a vow of Trappist silence than talk so eagerly on our mobile phones to well-placed inside-dopesters—former students, war criminals with training wheels—at the State Department, on the staff of the National Security Adviser or columnizing for the *Washington Times*. But Bellow has always indulged his taste for the flamboyant. And better Abe, so full of big ideas that go all the way back, than... well, in *Augie*, there was Einhorn, and in *Seize the Day*, Tamkin, and in *Humboldt's Gift*, Cantabile. Bald Abe, with his milky-white legs in his blue-and-white kimono "fit for a shogun," in the Hotel Crillon penthouse in Paris, among oil sheiks and Michael Jackson groupies, hating his father and scattering his food, is a distinct improvement on these charlatan gurus. At least, like his main man Socrates, he will die without self-pity.

As long as we think of Ravelstein as Bloom, we are still fighting the culture wars, still reviewing The Closing of the American Mind.

Chick encouraged Abe to write his book, which is why Abe is now rich and no longer has to pawn his Jensen silver teapot and his Quimper antique plates to his colleagues and admirers to pay for the Dunhill lighter or the Mont Blanc pen that he suddenly can't live without. Abe laughs at Chick's jokes. (Example: "Maybe an unexamined life is not worth living. But a man's examined life can make him wish he was dead.") On the other hand, he seems to have an odd investment in Chick's guilelessness, especially about women. Whereas, while Chick likes to listen to Abe talk about anything—from Maimonides to Mel Brooks—he has his doubts about Abe's settled certainty on everything he talks about. ("Of course my needs were different from Ravelstein's. In my trade you have to make allowances, taking all sorts of ambiguities into account—to avoid hard-edged judgments.... In art, you become familiar with due process. You can't simply write off people or send them to hell.") Nor should you invite them to the country. Abe, for whom "nature and solitude are poison," is mystified by Chick's periodic idylls in the woods. ("He said, repeating the opinion of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, that a tree, so beautiful to look at, never spoke a word and that conversation was possible only in the city, between men.")

Yet if we refuse to embrace the contradictions of our loved ones, we will be left loveless. Nobody wants to wind up like Norman Podhoretz, whose only remaining friend is America. So we are finally won over to these two old men, cranky and horny, discussing Greeks, Jews, death and sex, in their very own parrot-filled agora. "I was free," says Chick, "to confess to Ravelstein what I couldn't tell anyone else, to describe my weaknesses, my corrupt shameful secrets, and the cover-ups that drain your strength." And Ravelstein, although HIV-positive and dying of its complications and infections, nevertheless "insisted on telling me over and over again what love was—the neediness, the awareness of incompleteness, the longing for wholeness, and how the pains of Eros were joined to the most ecstatic pleasures":

> He was not one of those people for whom love has been debunked and punctured—for whom it is a historical, Romantic myth long in dying but today finally dead. He thought—no, he *saw*—that every soul was looking for its peculiar other, longing for its complement.... there is a certain irreducible splendor about it without which we would not be quite human. Love is the highest function of our species—its vocation.

Thus, for Chick, even after flunking so many previous marriages, another gallant try with Rosamund. Thus, for Abe, even as the plague takes him, a devotion to Nikki that is reciprocated even after Nikki has stayed up till 4 in the morning watching kung fu movies from his native Singapore. But now we come to the distance between these strenuous poses.

For all that Chick tells us about Abe's disapproval "of queer antics and of what he called 'faggot behavior,'" about how "he couldn't bear the fluttering of effeminate men," about how "he despised campy homosexuality and took a very low view of 'gay pride,'" he also worries the subject like a sick tooth's socket. Sometimes this nervousness is high-minded:

> In matters of sex, I sometimes felt, Ravelstein saw me as a throwback, an anachronism. I was his close friend. But I was the child of a traditional European Jewish family, with a vocabulary for inversion going back two millennia or more. The ancestral Jewish terms for it were, first, *Tum-tum*, dating perhaps from the Babylon captivity. Sometimes the word was *andreygenes*, obviously

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of Alexandrian, Hellenistic origin—the two sexes merged in one erotic and perverse darkness.

At least as often, however, we are closer to wincing home. When Vela accuses Chick of having had corrupt sex with Ravelstein, "I laughed like anything. I told her I didn't even know how the act was done, and that I wasn't ready to learn, at my age." He concedes that "you couldn't, as the intimate and friend of Ravelstein, avoid knowing a great deal more than you had an appetite for. But at a certain depth there were places in your psyche that still belonged to the Middle Ages. Or even to the age of the pyramids or Ur of the Chaldees." Are we clear? Abe is "doomed to die because of his irregular sexual ways," to be "destroyed by his reckless sex habits." Ravelstein's sinful "taste for sexy mischief," his relish for "*louche* encounters, the fishy and the equivocal," combined perhaps with his impatience for hygiene, his "biological patchiness" and his "faulty, darkened heart and lungs"—"When he coughed you heard the sump at the bottom of a mine shaft echoing"—add up to a shadowing of "risk, limit, death's blackout" on "every living moment." To be sure, "to prolong his life was not one of Ravelstein's aims," but it is certainly one of Chick's, and has been ever since he chose, at age 8, not to die of peritonitis: "No one can give up on the pictures."

So the white crane flashing its wings faces off against the master strumming his lute. Abe is an "atheist-materialist." Chick, for all his passionate attachment to the faces of people and surfaces of things, for all his sense of "privilege" at being "permitted to see—to see, touch, hear" an "articulated reality" in "the interval of light between the darkness in which you awaited first birth and then the darkness of death that would receive you," nonetheless believes that "the pictures must and will continue." *The dead aren't gone for good.* Daily, he will talk to Ravelstein.

But only after he has gone there himself and then come back, "blindly recovery-bent," with "the deep and special greed of the sick when they have decided not to die." If the philosopher was teaching us how to go, the novelist, with the heroic help of his wife, will teach us how to stay. The last fifty extraordinary pages of *Ravelstein* take us from Abe's memorial service...to a Caribbean vacation for Chick and Rosamund...to a French restaurant, a toxic fish, food-poisoning and nerve damage to a bewildered Chick...to an emergency airlift, actually an angelic skyjacking, prestidigitated by resourceful Rosamund...to oxygen and Boston and a hospital "end zone"...to a falling passage through circles of hellish hallucination—nightmares of cannibalism, cryonics, bank vaults and Filene's Basement—to the light again and the wife who saved him. This may be the same light Saul Bellow once found in Jerusalem, whose filtering of blood and thought allowed him to imagine "the outer garment of God." But the wife is the novelist's own, the mother-to-be of a brand-new child for an octogenarian adept of due process. About this woman, Lazarus will say: "Rosamund had studied love—Rousseauan romantic love and the Platonic Eros as well, with Ravelstein—*but she knew far more about it than either her teacher or her husband.*" [Emphasis added.]

There's a punch line, like the grandest of ideas dissolved by music into a form of feeling, like the opening of an American mind. ■

Did Elgin Cheat at Marbles?

DAVID RUDENSTINE

When I answered my hotel telephone, the desk clerk said that my translators were waiting for me. I went downstairs quickly. After we had introduced ourselves, I expanded on what I had previously written them—that I wanted to find whatever I could about Lord Elgin's taking of the Parthenon marbles during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Within minutes we set off for the archives of the Ottoman Empire, walking through Istanbul's narrow, winding streets, across the historic Hippodrome and past the breathtaking Blue Mosque, the monumental Hagia Sophia, tantalizing restaurants and innumerable eye-catching rug stores. Within thirty minutes we arrived at the archival center, a low-lying, drab, post–World War II rectangular building.

I had made careful arrangements through an American lawyer with the director of the archives so that I, as a foreigner, would be given immediate access to the archives and not have to wait the customary two days while my application was processed. But as luck would have it, the director was unexpectedly in Ankara for a few days of meetings and his assistants knew nothing of my coming. Yet after an hour of conversation, telephone calls and a review of letters, I and my Turkish Ottoman translators were permitted access to the main reading room. We settled into some free desks, located the indexes to the archives and commenced working. This effort continued on and off till the end of June 1998. Subsequently I visited the Public Record Office in London, and I consulted with archivists at Parliament as I searched for additional documents bearing on Lord Elgin's taking of the world's greatest collection of classical Greek sculptures and the celebrated dispute between Greece and Britain over whether the British Museum should return the marbles to Athens. Acrimonious as the debate has been, when one scrutinizes its historical premises for what gave rise to them, what is to be found is, to say the least, surprising.

The fabulous marbles, sculpted during the age of Pericles under the guiding hand of Phidias out of fine white Pentelic marble quarried ten miles from Athens and hauled by oxcart to the Acropolis, remained on the high walls of the Parthenon until the first decade of the nineteenth century. At that time, a period of severe international disorder because of the Napoleonic Wars, the marbles were removed and shipped to London at the behest of Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin and eleventh of Kincardine and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of His Britannic Majesty to the Sublime Porte of Selim III, Sultan of Turkey in Constantinople.

Since then, Elgin's controversial taking has frequently been both criticized and defended by poets, artists, cultural leaders, politicians, diplomats, lawyers and academics. Only recently, these marbles have again captured international attention. A year ago, the European Parliament urged Britain to return the collection, and at the end of 1999, President Clinton offered to mediate Greece's demand that Britain return the marbles. A conference last year at the British Museum, which focused on the improper and subsequently concealed cleaning—really scraping—of the marbles

David Rudenstine, who teaches at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, will spend next year as a fellow in Princeton University's law and public affairs program working on his book, Trophies for the Empire: The Tale of the Parthenon Marbles.

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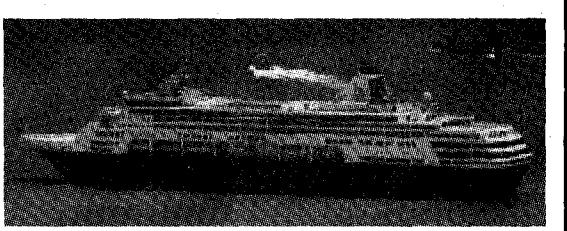

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in the 1930s, became a forum for swapping charges and countercharges among those supporting retention or return, with the Greek representatives eventually walking off in anger.

The battleground over the marbles sweeps broadly across legal, moral, ethical and historical considerations. Those defending the taking and the retention of the marbles make several tenuous claims: Lord Elgin had impeccable legal title to the marbles because the Ottomans, who ruled Greece at the time, gave him permission to take them; Britain deserves the marbles because Elgin's taking of them preserved them from looters, collectors and air pollution; the marbles are now part of its patrimony; they are more accessible in London than they would be if they were in Athens; Greece is not prepared to take adequate care of the marbles; and returning them would set a bad precedent, resulting in the emptying of exhibition halls of the world's great museums.

The claims of those favoring return have been comparably strenuous: The Ottomans lacked moral authority to alienate public monuments; the removal of the marbles caused irreparable damage to the structure of the Parthenon; the return of the marbles to Athens will facilitate scholarly study; Greece is prepared to protect and preserve the marbles; and the great museums of the industrialized West cannot turn a deaf ear to all claims for the important remains of a heritage merely because such claims threaten established collections.

As complicated and wide-ranging as this debate may be, both sides have taken as a starting point the assumption that the Ottomans gave Elgin permission to remove the marbles. After so many years of debate and animosity, it may be hard to imagine that there is anything new under the sun to say about this highly significant issue. But there is, and what is new is no small matter. Indeed, as things turn out (and as somewhat surmised by Christopher Hitchens in his book *The Elgin Marbles*) the assumption shared by advocates on both sides of the debate—that the Ottomans gave Lord Elgin permission to remove the marbles—is no more than a grand illusion.

The story preferred by the defenders of how Lord Elgin obtained the Parthenon marbles goes something like this: Lord Elgin was dedicated to improving aesthetic tastes in England and to saving the Parthenon marbles from destruction wrought by travelers who wanted them as trophies for their manors and Ottoman troops who used them for target practice and mortar. Taking advantage of Ottoman solicitude toward Britain in the wake of the 1801 British defeat of the French forces in Egypt, then part of the Ottoman Empire, Lord Elgin asked the highest officials in Constantinople for permission to remove the marble statuary from the Parthenon. Because the Ottomans were eager to have Britain return control of Egypt to them, the Ottomans, who had for decades denied the French, their ally, these exquisite sculptures, quickly consented to the British ambassador's request. If Elgin exceeded the authority given him by taking marbles from the Parthenon walls—the metopes, the friezes and the free-standing statuary—as opposed to marble statuary on the ground or unearthed through excavation, Ottoman authorities subsequently approved of and condoned Elgin's stripping of the marbles. Although it has been unchallenged for the better part of two centuries, there is little truth to this story.

An assumption on both sides of the debate—that the Ottomans gave Elgin permission to take the marbles—is but a grand illusion.

It is true that Lord Elgin told a parliamentary committee that he took the marbles from the Parthenon to rescue them and to improve aesthetic tastes in England. But Elgin made these statements in 1816, whereas he began taking the marbles in 1801. In that year, Elgin's reasons for collecting classical Greek marbles were far more personal. In July of 1801, Elgin wrote to Giovanni Battista Lusieri, an Italian painter he employed to coordinate his marble collection in Athens: "I should wish to collect as much marble as possible. I have other places in my house which need it, and besides, one can easily multiply ornaments of beautiful marble without overdoing it." In other words, at the dawn of that century Elgin was passionate about decorating his Scottish manor, not improving the aesthetics of England or saving the marbles from destruction.

The British claim that the Ottomans gave Lord Elgin prior permission to denude the Parthenon relies on an English document printed in the appendix of an 1816 report of a parliamentary committee convened to evaluate Elgin's request that the British government purchase the Parthenon marbles from him. (Parliament went on to vote, 82 to 30, to buy them and give them over to the British Museum.) The Parliament report presents this document as an accurate English translation of a July 1801 Ottoman document that, according to Elgin, authorized the removal of the marbles. Elgin told the committee that the original Ottoman document was given to Ottoman officials in Athens in 1801. Yet no researcher has ever located this Ottoman document, and when I was in Istanbul I searched in vain for it or any copy of it, as well as for any reference to it in other sorts of documents or a description of its substantive terms in any related official papers. Although a document of some sort may have existed, it seems to have vanished into thin air, despite the fact that the Ottoman archives contain an enormous number of other documents from the period.

Putting aside for the moment the all-important question of just what activities this English document might have authorized Lord Elgin to carry out, there are serious questions about the authenticity and reliability of this historically prominent piece of paper. The parliamentary record reveals that it was not Elgin himself but a young clergyman who worked for him, the Rev. Philip Hunt, who claimed that he had a copy of the 1801 Ottoman document. Hunt, who appeared as the committee's very last witness, told the committee that he had an Italian translation of the Ottoman original in Bedford, about sixty miles north of London. He explained that he did not have the document with him because, when he left Bedford, he did not know he was going to be a witness. The record also indicates that the English document printed in the report was forwarded to the parliamentary committee by Hunt, and that the committee never saw the Italian translation that Hunt claimed to possess. Thus, Parliament never assured itself that the English document sent by Hunt was a faithful translation of the Italian document. A contemporary British historian, William St. Clair, who recently published a third edition of his biography of Lord Elgin, claims to possess Hunt's Italian document and vouches for the accuracy of the English translation.

Nonetheless, the failure of Parliament, which was running a worldwide empire at the time, to secure Hunt's Italian document, to obtain a verified copy of the Ottoman document in Athens or to secure a statement from Ottoman authorities in Istanbul that Lord Elgin had been officially allowed to remove the marbles certainly suggests that it was not all that eager to get to the bottom of this crucial question. In short, by failing to investigate with due diligence, Parliament protected itself from

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gaining more confidence about what actually happened and from obtaining documents that might support (or disprove) its findings of fact.

In addition to its startling failure to secure the best evidence it could pertaining to the strength of Lord Elgin's legal claim to the marbles, Parliament actually misled the public about the evidence it had concerning the authenticity of the document. The English document printed on page 69 of the committee's report has at its end the following words: "(Signed with a signet.) SEGED ABDULLAH KAIMACAN."

The plain suggestion inherent in the placement of this line at the end of the text in the report is clear: that the document examined by the committee had a signet and was signed by the Acting Grand Vizier at the time, thus giving it legal force and legitimacy. But the document examined by the committee—one purportedly translated from an Italian document that was supposedly translated from an Ottoman original—did not have a signet or signature on it at all. Moreover, St. Clair has told me that the Italian document he possesses has no signet either, nor is it even signed.

As much as these considerations undermine the legitimacy of this highly touted document, it has another flaw, this one deadly. The English-language document Hunt submitted to Parliament was not a completely faithful English translation of the Italian document Hunt said he possessed. The first sentence of the second paragraph of the text provided to Parliament by Hunt and printed in the committee's report begins with the following words: "We therefore have written this Letter to you, and expedited it by Mr. Philip Hunt, an English Gentleman, Secretary of the aforesaid Ambassador, in order..." But St. Clair has written that the Italian document he has actually indicates: "We therefore have written this letter to you and expedited it by N.N., in order..."

St. Clair does not perceive any significance in this discrepancy. Perhaps he is correct. But that seems unlikely. The difference is so peculiar that it was certainly not accidental. No one would mistakenly substitute "Mr. Philip Hunt, an English Gentleman, Secretary of the aforesaid Ambassador," for the letters "N.N." Moreover, the context in which Hunt created the discrepancy suggests his reasons for doing so: By the time Hunt appeared before the committee, it had questioned Elgin at some length about whether he had authority to remove the marbles from the walls of the Parthenon. While Elgin consistently insisted he did have such authority, he also admitted that he had no papers to support his claim. Thus, when Hunt testified, he knew that the committee was seriously concerned about the lack of documentation authorizing Elgin to take the marbles, and it seems likely that Hunt became a witness solely to provide the documentation the committee sought. When Hunt forwarded the English document to the committee, it would appear that he substituted "Mr. Philip Hunt, an English Gentleman, Secretary of the aforesaid Ambassador" for "N.N." in the hope that the alternative language would shore up the authenticity of his "evidence" and the circumstances as to how it was that he alone came to possess the critical document. In short, through the insertion of his name, Hunt put himself in a position in which he could simultaneously vouch for the authenticity of the document and explain why he alone had a copy of it fifteen years after he surrendered the original to Ottoman officials in Athens.

Although these considerations are sufficient challenge to the English document as a reliable basis for any legal claim by Britain, there is another factor that casts an even darker shadow over the proceedings. During his testimony before the committee on February 29, Elgin was questioned about whether the Ottomans gave him permission to remove the marbles. Elgin stated that the Ottomans gave him written permissions more than once, but that he had "retained none of them." At two other, separate moments during the examination, Elgin denied having a copy of any document granting him permission. Hunt appeared before the committee on March 13. The committee's second question to Hunt was, "Did you ever see any of the written permissions which were granted to [Lord Elgin] for removing the Marbles from the Temple of Minerva?" Hunt answered, "Yes." He then stated that the original document had been sent to Athens but that he had an Italian translation of the original. During his testimony, Hunt did not explain how it was that he retained the Italian document for fifteen years. Nor did Hunt state how it was that Elgin had known nothing about it when he had testified nearly two weeks beforehand.

It is of course possible that Hunt possessed an accurate Italian translation of an original Ottoman document. But look at the chronology: Elgin appears, denying ever having a copy—in any language—of a relevant document. It is plain from his testimony that he knows of none possessed by others; by the time he completes his testimony, however, he sees that the committee is eager to view *some* sort of

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written authorization for the removal of the marbles from the Parthenon walls. In a fortnight, Hunt appears and claims to have an accurate translation of the original order. Is this chain of events enough to make anyone a tad suspicious? There is no suggestion in the testimony as to how it came to pass that Hunt became a witness before the committee.

Let's assume the authenticity of the English document printed in the committee's report, for a moment, just to take another approach to the issue. Did this document authorize Elgin to remove marble statuary from the Parthenon walls? The British claim that it did rests on a handful of words. They provide that no one should "hinder them [Elgin's agents] from taking away any pieces of stone with inscriptions or figures." But by themselves theses few words fail to authorize removal of marble statuary from the Parthenon edifice. Moreover, when they are read in the context of the entire document, the assertion that they permitted Lord Elgin to remove metopes, friezes and statues from the Parthenon walls is specious. The document describes the activities that Lord Elgin wanted his workers to conduct, and those were limited to measuring, drawing, painting, excavating and making molds. There is not one word in the document suggesting, intimating or implying that Elgin sought permission to remove marbles from the walls. In addition, the document itself emphasizes to the local Ottoman officials in Athens that they should honor the permission given to Lord Elgin, "particularly as there is no harm in the said figures and edifices being thus viewed, contemplated, and designed." In short, even by its own terms, the 1801 document fails to support the claim that Elgin had good title to the marbles; it actually negates the idea that the Ottomans gave Elgin permission to remove them.

Even Lord Elgin did not interpret any July 1801 exchange with the authorities as granting him permission to remove marbles from the Parthenon walls. On July 10, 1801, just a few days after he received the Ottoman directive, Lord Elgin wrote to Lusieri: "Besides, you have now the permission to dig, and there a great field is opened for medals, and for the remains both of sculpture and architecture." What Elgin considered "extraordinary" about the permission he had secured was that his artists now had permission to "dig," or to excavate, which meant that they might discover buried marble sculptures. If Elgin believed that his men had been given a green light to denude the Parthenon of famous antiquities, he would have celebrated that power, not the prospect of digging for buried unknowns.

Although this evidence alone is more than sufficient to overcome the claim that the 1801 document gave Elgin prior permission, there is yet more. In July 1801, Elgin sent the young minister Philip Hunt to Athens. When Hunt arrived, he promptly visited the Voivode, the local Ottoman official. Using threats and bribes, he persuaded the Voivode to permit Elgin's artists to enter the Acropolis for the limited purposes of drawing, measuring, painting and molding. A few days later Hunt met the Voivode again and, struck by the Voivode's favorable attitude toward Britain now that Britain controlled Egypt and the degree to which the Voivode appeared intimidated by the power of the British ambassador (Lord Elgin), Hunt then requested permission to remove a marble sculpture from the Parthenon walls. The Voivode agreed. In the early morning of July 31, a ship's carpenter, five crew members and twenty Athenian laborers mounted the walls of the Parthenon and removed the first metope. The next day they lowered a second. During the weeks following, Lusieri and his men lowered many other marble sculptures.

Lord Elgin was in Constantinople at the time and had no idea that Hunt had secured permission from the Voivode in Athens to remove marbles from the Parthenon walls; nor did he know that metopes were lowered from the Parthenon in his name on July 31 or August 1. In fact, Lord Elgin did not learn of this development until mid-August, when letters from Hunt and Lusieri arrived in Constantinople. Elgin's glee in response to the news is captured in a letter he wrote to Lusieri dated October 8, 1801. He told Lusieri of his "infinite pleasure" when he learned of the marbles and confessed to Lusieri that taking marbles from the walls "now seems to promise success beyond our most ardent hopes."

As is evident, Elgin did not request or receive permission to remove the marbles, and seems to have had no prior intention of denuding the Parthenon. The deed was initiated by Hunt—who fifteen years later would produce for Parliament the document on which so much has since hinged—and made possible by intimidated and bribed Ottoman officials in Athens, who in any event lacked authority to permit the desecration that ensued.

If Elgin did not receive prior permission, the British claim in addition that the Ottomans gave him approval to remove the marbles after the fact. First, as the British Museum's guide to the Parthenon collection states with regard to events the following year, 1802:

> On his return to Constantinople Elgin obtained documents from the Turkish Government approving all that the Voivode and the Disdar (local Ottoman officials in Athens) had done in Athens to assist Lusieri's work on behalf of Elgin. Lusieri seems to have handed them over to the two officials and no copies have survived. Had they done so, they would no doubt support Elgin's claim that everything he did had been approved by the Turkish authorities.

As is readily conceded, these 1802 documents are missing. In Istanbul, I searched without success for them, too, or for copies of them, or for some reference to them, among other papers in the Ottoman archives. As with the 1801 documents, there is no trace—as if the whole affair had never occurred. Thus, no one knows who wrote these documents, whether any such author knew the full details of what Elgin's agents in Athens had done or whether the documents' author was even authorized to grant retroactive ratification. We have no summary of the content of these documents, nor any surviving secondary-source claim to quote critical language from them. These are surely fatal flaws to the contention that the missing documents retroactively approved of or condoned the removal of the marbles and were a vehicle for passing to Elgin good legal title.

Second, it is asserted that since the Ottomans permitted Elgin to *ship* his collection to London, they must have condoned the taking. Again, the British Museum's guide to the collection states the position with unabashed clarity:

> This firman to remove the marbles must imply that any irregularities that may have occurred in interpreting the powers granted by the previous document were at least condoned if not fully approved.

As with the 1801 and the 1802 documents, though, no order permitting the shipment of the marbles has survived, or at least been found. I was unable to locate one, a copy of one or any reference to one in the voluminous Ottoman archives.

Even if we assumed such a document did exist—yet again, that is—the mere shipping of the marbles does not establish that informed, appropriate Ottoman officials condoned Elgin's removal of the marbles. There is much that we don't know; yet what we *do* know is that the British ambassador's agent at the time gave bribes

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to Ottoman officials to facilitate the shipment of the marbles out of Greece. Such bribes would seem to poison any claim of legitimacy that might otherwise be imputed to permission to ship.

Although possession is often nine-tenths of the law, this is one dispute in which more than possession matters. Because the longstanding Greek claim for the return of the marbles has broad international support, the European Parliament's being only the latest and most prominent, Britain has never defended its possession of the marbles by claiming that it is keeping them merely because it prizes them. Instead, Britain has consistently tried to strengthen its political position by asserting that it has no moral or legal obligation to Greece because the Ottomans gave Elgin permission to make off with Phidias' handiwork. No one expects Britain to roll over and play dead with the undermining of the moral and legal high ground it has sought to occupy. But correcting historical misconceptions and fallacious legal judgments does strengthen Greece's hand in the debate. Indeed, the information detailed in this article is to be presented later this month in Athens at a UNESCO-sponsored scholarly conference on the Parthenon sculptures and the repatriation issue.

Of course, the conventional wisdom is that Britain will never return the marbles. But few imagined that Britain would surrender India to an old man clothed in a sheet, either. The odds, from my point of view, are that Britain will eventually repatriate the marbles to Greece, and when it does so, it will be acknowledging, whether it wishes to or not, that what was acceptable during the age of empire must give way to the demands of an ever-shrinking world that aspires to the rule of law. ■

FILMS

Village Idiots, Then & Now

STUART KLAWANS

THE IDIOTS • THE SORROW AND THE PITY

To watch Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* is to see a dead dog rise and howl at the moon. The dog is a century's worth of Dadaists, avant-garde theater troupes and convention-hating communards—cliques that no longer hound present-day society, unless they're jolted into jerky, artificial motion. Von Trier, playing Dr. Frankenstein of the Dogs, patched together one such animal and made it yip when he assembled the Dogma '95 group of filmmakers. (In a gesture that combined irony with nostalgia, Dogma even issued a manifesto.) *The Idiots*—a 1998 film that is now being released in the United States—takes as its subject another such group, this one wholly fictional. They are a disorganization of youngish people living as squatters in an affluent suburb of Copenhagen, who devote themselves to upsetting bourgeois propriety by "spassing": pretending to be mentally retarded.

Suiting style to matter, von Trier narrates the story like an idiot. The characters initially lack families, jobs, hobbies, educations, sexual relationships or access to a calendar. The camera, which is itself a kind of idiot, records nothing about these people except immediate data: physiognomies, clothes and names. It's only at the very end of the movie that we learn how many days have passed. It's only then that we discover what any "normal" film would have told us right away: the back story of the point-of-view character.

Her name is Karen (Bodil Jorgensen), and when first seen she is at a carnival, watching the Wheel of Fortune spin. She smiles a lot—sweetly, simply, joylessly—as if resigned to the wheel's decisions. Her eyes, dark and sunken, develop deeper creases with every grin. Her clothes—a loose, puke-green sweater, worn over a floral-print pillowcase of a dress—hang from her body like an apology, addressed to the world at large.

We don't know how Karen reached this state, only that she's been reduced to dining alone in restaurants where waiters feel free to insult her. It's at this point that she encounters her first Idiots, led by lanky, white-blond Stoffer (Jens Albinus), whose long face is composed of a bottle-opener nose over rubber-band lips. He's having a high time in the restaurant, using these caricaturist's features for the purpose of drooling, rolling his head and "being friendly" to diners who wish he'd go away. Karen alone won't shrink from him. Without knowing he's putting on an act, she holds his hand and so, inadvertently, gets swept away with the group.

In effect, she's joined an acting company, as *The Idiots* soon makes clear. After an excursion, the troupe reviews its performance, with Stoffer arrogating to himself the post of director. ("Jeppe stank. He wasn't in the moment. Did you think he was in the moment?" "I don't know, I was trying to feel it for myself.") As if this weren't enough, the film occasionally exposes its own tools, allowing a boom mike to drop into the picture or letting one camera operator catch another at work. Not that the camera operators work well. Crowingly crude in look, *The Idiots* is a mess of jostling frames, on-the-fly pans and unadjusted exposures. The most "artless" technique, signifying raw-life documentary, records the antics of fictional characters; the fictional characters meanwhile demonstrate what's being done by real actors, right before your eyes.

It's canny of von Trier to have us follow Karen into this maze. Pleasant-looking rather than attractive, on the cusp between youth and middle age, she's the perfect middling figure, always well-meaning and common-sensical. Aren't we all? So, in effect, she's like an audience member, put up on the screen among the actors. Through her, we're attracted to Stoffer and the other Idiots; through her, we're repulsed by them; and through her, we experience the breakdown between art and life, or rather the breakdown *of* life.

Attraction: On Karen's first excursion, the Idiots take advantage of one of those free educational tours that factories offer. The tour guide, in the manner of corporate spokespersons, talks down to his public, and the Idiots get their revenge by being even dumber than anticipated. Here, at the start of the film, the satirical target is clear and the aim precise. These scenes would make a cow laugh.

Repulsion: Like Karen, you will perhaps feel that the characters are not just "searching for their inner idiot," in the manner of actors digging for that core of authenticity. They're making fun of damaged and defenseless people. As if to manifest your objection, von Trier contrives a visit to the Idiots by people who really are retarded. Fiction comes face to face with truth. Squirm away.

Breakdown: Like Dadaists and guer-

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rilla-theater performers, the Idiots despise the fourth wall. At least Stoffer despises it. For him, the ultimate test is to "spass" not before strangers but with people who really matter to you. I don't think I'm detracting from the impact of *The Idiots* when I reveal that Karen alone is willing to take this risk. By the time she does, several other characters have given us glimpses of their lives outside the group—glimpses that seem to dissolve the illusion, so that the character fades from the story. But only Karen leads us back from the Idiots' suburban retreat to a fully realized social world, where her situation is at once mundane and wretched. Only she challenges——

What? Who or what does Karen challenge at the end? Herself? Her family? You? The conventions of bourgeois life? The conventions of antibourgeois art? I can't detract from the impact of *The Idiots* because I can't give a single answer to the question. The film ends with an emotional pileup far more brutal and abrupt than the earlier, imbecilic "gang rape" that has earned *The Idiots* notoriety (and a set of digitized Band-Aids for the American release). And what's most curious about this climax is that its force comes from fiction, which has at last taken over. The documentary impulse—or perhaps documentary pretense, in this case—breaks down, and life erupts.

Go ahead, laugh. Squirm. Hear the dead dog howl.

Unseen in the United States since 1987, and never seen here before in a completely subtitled print, Marcel Ophuls's great documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity* is being re-released by Milestone Film. I shouldn't have to say more; your copy of *The Nation* should now be on the floor, and you should be heading toward the nearest theater showing the film. (In New York City, that would be Film Forum, May 12–25.) But thirteen years is a long time in the movie world, and twenty-nine (the number of years since the premiere) is an eternity. I will intrude to explain this much:

Ophuls made the film, a "chronicle of a French city under the Occupation," in the wake of May 1968. The conservative, established powers of French state and society, under the leadership of de Gaulle's party, had just reasserted themselves, basing their moral authority, as always, on the myth of Gaullist heroism during the Occupation. The response of Ophuls and his fellow filmmakers was to secure financing from Swiss and German television—French television declined to back the project—and explode the myth, by taking a thorough look at resistance and collaboration during World War II.

The Sorrow and the Pity was therefore a portrait of present-day France, as much as it was an investigation of historic events. This aspect of the film, its contemporaneity, has now been lost to us. We cannot respond as did people in 1971, when the word dropped that then-President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had been a self-deluded acolyte of Marshal Pétain. Nor can we experience the exultation or outrage of audiences back then, when they heard Denis Rake—a former British agent in occupied France—explain almost unwillingly that workers and Communists had given tremendous support to the Resistance, but that the bourgeoisie had been, well, apathetic.

That much is lost. What remains is a grand, astonishingly comprehensive document, recorded with unfailing persistence and intelligence. Ophuls detailed the full range of French responses to Nazism, as experienced primarily by people in the town of Clermont-Ferrand. That was the first, and most invaluable, level of his achievement. Nobody else managed to get all these characters on camera.

At the top were figures such as former Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France, former British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Resistance leader (and *Libération* publisher) Emmanuel D'Astier de la Vigerie and Christian de la Mazière, an aristocrat who fought with the Nazis in the Charlemagne Division and later recalled how much fun Paris had been during the Occupation. Those at the bottom included Resistance fighters (and farmers) Alexis and Louis Grave, high school teachers Danton and Dionnet (who recalled doing nothing when a fellow teacher, a Jew, was dismissed) and movie theater owner Pierre le Calvez, who was still upset, when interviewed, that German troops had been attacked on their way to his show.

The Sorrow and the Pity brings you all these people; and it also brings you the newsreels of the period. The film is full of old footage; and one shock that hasn't faded is Ophuls's use of the Nazis' propaganda. He kept finding small, damning particles of truth within their structure of lies. In the context of a film, what could be more awful than the revelation that Nazi "documentarians," to even a slight degree, were right?

There is still more, of course—not least of which is the framing interview, shot with terrible irony at a wedding banquet, where the paterfamilias was a plump and happy former Nazi. I leave you with that image, and with the renewed urging to watch *The Sorrow and the Pity*. It runs 270 minutes, and you need to see them all. ■

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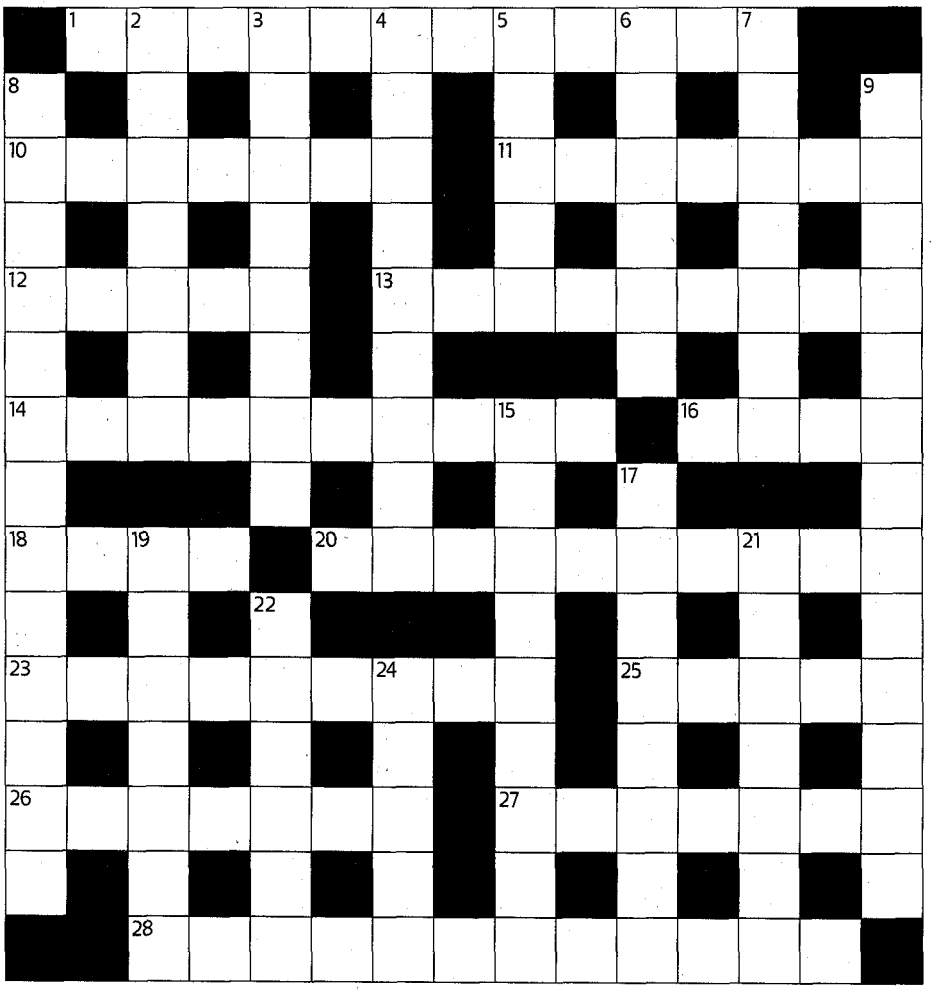

ACROSS

1 Pitchers need water and also the ones near the plate that catch such as drops coming from them—but they have latent power. (3,9)

10 You might look for a small one in the den—one of a million Cubans. (4,3)

11 What one takes from nobody was wrong, causing loud laughter. (7)

12 Perhaps Fate's should be comparatively good when enough is cited. (5)

13 Is the song about a busy New York square? (They might be Diana's herbs.) (9)

14 The baby's toy has a backward part that might have been described as a flivver. (10)

16 See 4 down

18 One must be three-quarters around to steal this. (4)

20 Certain old moralized fables would show the best one precedes a sign in the sky. (10)

23 The part played with letters surrounding CD is a streamer attached to the masthead. (9)

25 Nothing sort of hard about it, as the girl proves. (5)

26 Starts to get a complaint that the TV isn't working. (4,3)

27 Enjoying a string of good luck where you might expect to put the butter and marmalade? (2,1,4)

28 Describing the country from whose bourn no traveler returns? (12)

DOWN

2 The diplomacy required in a certain South American city might be required reading when people behave badly. (4,3)

3 Discussion of the lumbar region might be equated with what was sauce at one time. (4,4)

4 and **16** across When he thought of Robin's group, it might have been the Sheriff's objective—like crazy, in other words! (2,4,3,4)

5 In Treasure Island, Polly asked for pieces of this (built with a 2 x 4?). (5)

6 Roosevelt mentioned a day to live in it. (6)

7 When in town, would this be more expansive than Tchaikovsky's lake? (7)

8 Begrudging admission that the elite have everything? (3,3,3,4)

9 A fragment of pottery on a slow creature's likely to be difficult to break up. (2,4,2,5)

15 In Massachusetts, the leader of the battle went head to tail over Spanish gold. (9)

17 See 22

19 Automation loses to a sort of god for the brave. (7)

21 The way I swill my liquor suggests a form of chemical element. (7)

22 and **17** The triumph of hope over experience, according to Johnson. (6,8)

24 When a shot is really bad, it results in some four-letter words! (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2754

S	E	P	A	R	A	T	E		A	B	A	C	U	S
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CounterPunch the Muckraking Newsletter by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

"Shoot to Kill"

DC Cops' Secret Orders for World Bank/IMF Protests

As thousands of protesters converged on DC for the April 16 demonstrations against the World Bank and the IMF, the police were under strict orders that there would be no replay of Seattle on the streets of the nation's capital. Protest headquarters were raided on a trumped up pretext. Organizers were hauled off to jail, held without being charged, denied access to lawyers, food and medical attention. And the DC cops were authorized to "shoot to kill", if they felt they had to. In our current issue, CounterPunch breaks the story of the "shoot to kill" order, plus sensational coverage of this follow-up to Seattle.

As Radical As Reality

Seven years ago we felt unhappy about the state of radical journalism. It didn't have much edge. It didn't have many facts. It was politically timid. It was dull. So we founded CounterPunch. We wanted it to be the best muckraking newsletter in the country. We wanted it to take aim at the consensus of received wisdom about what can and cannot be reported. We wanted to give our readers a political roadmap they could trust.

If we're going to build a new movement for change in this country we have to be as radical as reality; we have to be optimistic; we have to believe in the power of ordinary people (not the elites) to change things.

Seven years later we stand firm on these same beliefs and hopes. We think we've restored the honor of muckraking journalism, in the tradition of all our favorite radical pamphleteers: Edward Abbey, Peter Maurin and Ammon Hennacy, Appeal to Reason, Jacques René Hébert, Tom Paine and John Lilburne.

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The Muckraking Newsletter edited by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

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